OPINION: CLOUD-EMPOWERED CLASSROOMS P.22 | FEATURES: SHENZHEN'S ROBOT REVOLUTION P.38

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People-centered progress in Xizang

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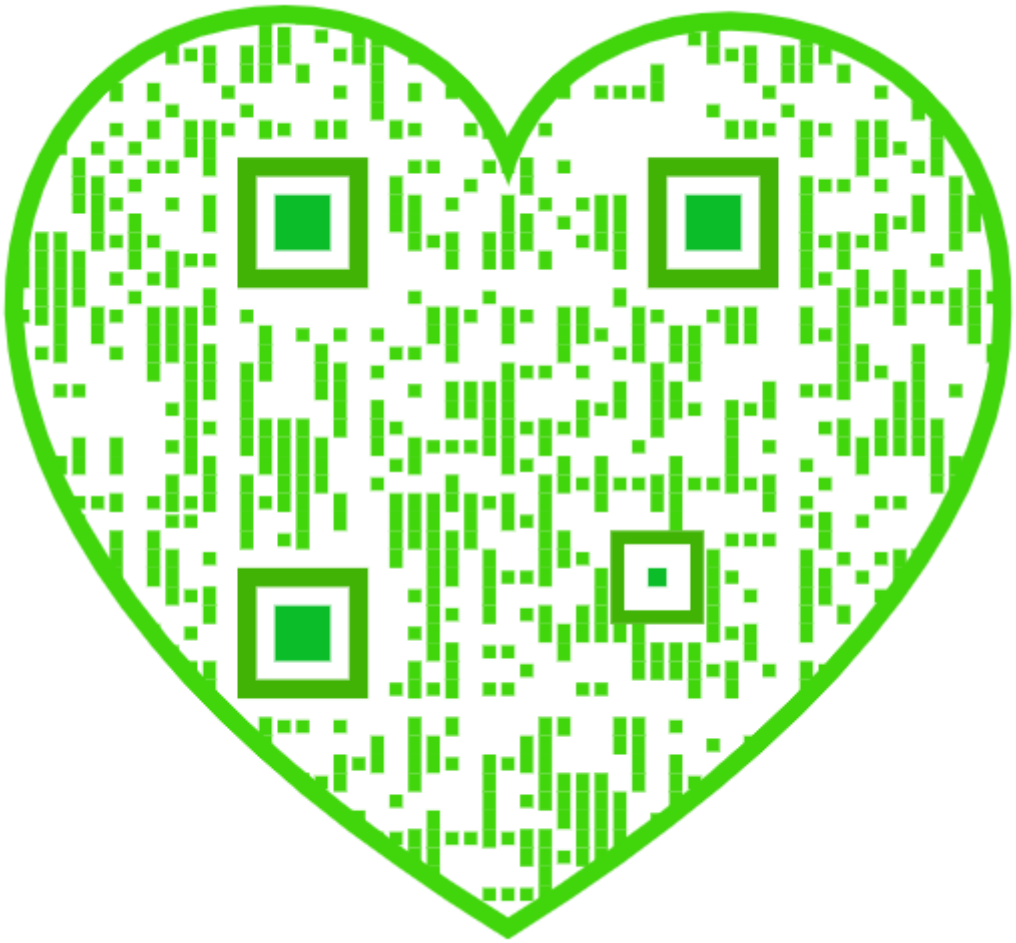

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Cover Photo: Two sisters play at home in a village in Xigaze, southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region, on January 22, 2023 (XINHUA)

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General Editorial Office
Tel: 86-10-68996252
Fax: 86-10-68326628
Editorial Desk
Tel: 86-10-68996250
Partnerships
Tel: 86-10-68995807
E-mail: yecong@cicgamericas.com
Distribution
Tel: 86-10-68310644
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Peak Performance

This year, Xizang Autonomous Region will strive to reach GDP growth of between 7 and 8 percent, higher than the 6.3-percent growth it achieved last year and much higher than the national target of around 5 percent set at this year's Two Sessions in early March. The target reflects continued government confidence, at both the central and regional levels, in the improvement in Xizang's social and economic development prospects.

Like China's other regions, Xizang has experienced rapid development of its economy, society and governance over the past seven decades, exchanging feudal serfdom for modern socialism and participating in the China Miracle brought about by the economic reforms since the late 1970s. Now, the region is moving forward in shared pursuit of China's mid-century goals for continued modernization and national rejuvenation.

Specifically, Xizang is focusing on achieving balanced regional development by promoting high-quality development, strengthening infrastructure, advancing industrial upgrading, safeguarding and improving people's wellbeing, increasing investment, optimizing the industrial structure, boosting green development, enhancing ecological protection and improving public services.

Some recent accomplishments include: In 2024, the percentage of days with excellent air quality remained above 99 percent, and the water quality of major rivers and lakes met or exceeded Grade III (good) standard; the population of the region increased from 1.23 million in 1959 to 3.66 million in 2020, and the average life expectancy increased from 35.5 years in 1959 to 72.19 years in 2020; the region has taken the national lead by establishing a 15-year publicly funded education system, from kindergarten all the way up to senior high school; in 2023, the region had 1,821 medical institutions (excluding village clinics) with 21,551 hospital beds and 29,379 healthcare professionals.

Most importantly, these achievements, alongside the region's sustained and rapid economic development, have laid strong foundations for the core purpose of improving people's wellbeing. The successes in the improvement of livelihoods, education and health are a vivid example of the Chinese development model in action. **BR**

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RITUALS AND REVELRY

People of the Dong ethnic group celebrate the Sama Festival in Sanbaodong Village, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province, on March 15.

The festival commemorates Sama, a heroine from the Dong ethnic group's ancient matriarchal society. It features rituals, dances and songs, with thousands participating in the festivities.

XINHUA

Robotics to Radiotherapy

A "drone medical transport" demonstration on March 14 during the 2025 China Medical Equipment Conference and Medical Equipment Exhibition in Chongqing. The four-day exhibition, which kicked off on March 13, showcased over 10,000 new products, technologies, applications and methods in the field of medical equipment.

Reduced Hospital Admissions

A study by medical scientists from Xi'an Jiaotong University in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, has shown that China's air pollution control measures may have averted more than 270,000 hospital admissions linked to heart and psychiatric diseases from 2013 to 2017, Xinhua News Agency reported on March 18.

The research analyzed over 48 million hospitalization records across 292 Chinese cities between 2013 and 2017, offering a comprehensive quantification of health benefits from the country's Air Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan (APPCAP) launched in 2013.

Fine particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 microns or smaller (PM2.5) and black carbon have long been believed to be associated with infectious and chronic illnesses, such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

Compared with 2013, the annual average concentrations of PM2.5 and black carbon in 2017 decreased by 28.61 percent and 20.35 percent, respectively, according to a study published in *Nature Medicine* journal on March 14.

The study shows that China's clean air policies have significantly reduced hospitalizations for nine major diseases, by an average of 30 percent for those linked to PM2.5 and 21.14 percent for those linked to black carbon.

For mental health, depression-related admissions fell by 34.35 percent, the largest decline among all conditions surveyed, followed by schizophrenia (32.56 percent). Clean air is also found to be related to reduced admissions of lower respiratory infections, Parkinson's disease and chronic kidney disease.

Smart Governance

As China deepens its digital transformation drive, multiple cities across the country have adopted DeepSeek-powered AI services to enhance governance and streamline urban management, Xinhua reported on March 18.

DeepSeek is a domestically developed advanced large language model that made global waves in late January.

China's southern tech hub Shenzhen has become the first city in the country to announce the deployment of the DeepSeek model in government services. Local government in the city's Longgang District completed the localization of the DeepSeek-R1 model within its digital infrastructure in early February, providing intelligent support for over 20,000 civil servants.

The district also integrated an AI assistant powered by DeepSeek into a mini-program on the Weixin superapp, known internationally as WeChat, to improve services for enterprises.

However, as AI-driven governance expands, experts say challenges related to data security, privacy protection and ethical considerations remain crucial.

"We should be mindful of the boundaries of AI applications to prevent over-reliance and systemic risks following the integration of AI into government systems," said Wu Shenkuo, Deputy Director of the Research Center of the Internet Society of China. "The ethical risks and fairness concerns arising from AI-assisted governance decisions also require a careful and comprehensive assessment," Wu added.

Free HPV Vaccines

The Chinese capital plans to administer free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines to seventh-grade girls starting in September, joining several provincial-level regions and cities that have announced similar initiatives since 2021.

The vaccination campaign

will utilize the domestically produced 2-valent vaccine with an aim to effectively reduce the risk of cervical cancer among women, according to a plan jointly released by the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control and other related authorities on March 13.

By the end of March, girls currently in grade six are expected to be assessed for willingness to receive the vaccine. By October 31, the first dose of the vaccine will be administered to the target group, as per the plan.

The move is a response to a global strategy launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that by 2030, 90 percent of girls are fully inoculated against HPV by the age of 15.

Cervical cancer was the fourth most common cancer among women worldwide in 2022, according to the WHO. Against this backdrop, China made free HPV vaccinations accessible to approximately 40 percent of girls aged 13 to 14 in 2024, as part of its ongoing work to tackle cervical cancer, according to the National Health Commission.

Boosting Births

Hohhot, capital of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, has promised cash rewards in a latest effort to boost birth rate and cope with the aging society.

The city will offer a one-time subsidy of 10,000 yuan ($1,394) for couples having their first child, according to a new regulation released on March 13.

A second child will receive 10,000 yuan per year until they turn 5 years old. For the third child or more, the annual subsidy is 10,000 yuan until the child turns 10, with the total amount reaching 100,000 yuan ($13,940), a relatively high amount compared with other cities.

Yang Zhong, deputy director of the city's health commission, said the measures are aimed at boosting the birth rate and spurring population growth.

Figures show that Hohhot, a roughly two-hour train ride north of Beijing, has a population of around 3.6 million. The city's birth rate showed a declining trend from 2019 to 2023, Yang said. The birth rate stood at 5.58 births per 1,000 people in 2023, though it slightly picked up in 2024 as more couples were willing to have babies in the Year of the Dragon, which concluded on January 28.

XINHUA

Springtime Splendor

Tourists visit the Hong Kong Flower Show in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on March 14. The show ran from March 14 to 23.

Counterfeit Crimes

Chinese procuratorial organs prosecuted 21,404 individuals in 2024 for the production and sale of counterfeit and substandard goods, according to the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) on March 14.

In addition, procuratorial organs nationwide approved the arrest of over 7,700 people last year in connection with these crimes.

The SPP also released six typical cases of making and selling counterfeit and substandard goods that are directly related to people's livelihoods, involving products such as fire extinguishers, diesel, cosmetics, fertilizer and pharmaceuticals.

The SPP said procuratorial organs will continue to crack down on counterfeit crimes, with a focus on addressing issues such as the sale of fake goods on online platforms and live-streaming channels, as well as ensuring food and drug safety in rural areas and urban-rural fringes.

XINHUA

Silver Adventures

Passengers take selfies with a tourist train for seniors at Beijing Fengtai Railway Station on March 15. The train, carrying 452 silver-haired passengers from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, is on a 12-day journey that started from Tianjin and will cover tourist attractions in Jiangxi, Hunan and Guangdong provinces.

Robust Growth

In the first two months of 2025, China's value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, increased 5.9 percent year on year, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on March 17. In February, industrial output grew 0.51 percent from January.

The country's fixed assets investment totaled more than 5.26 trillion yuan ($734 billion) during the January-February period. It increased 4.1 percent year on year and was 0.9 percentage points higher than the full-year growth rate of 2024.

Investment in infrastructure construction during the two months rose 5.6 percent from a year ago, with manufacturing investment increasing 9 percent.

The services sector also registered accelerated growth in the period, with its official production index growing 5.6 percent year on year, a rate 0.4 percentage points faster than the 2024 whole-year growth rate.

Retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of a country's consumption strength, climbed 4 percent year on year in the first two months to over 8.37 trillion yuan ($1.15 trillion), according to the NBS.

The country's overall employment landscape has remained stable, with the average surveyed urban unemployment rate standing at 5.3 percent, level with the same period of last year.

Speaking at a press conference on March 17, NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui attributed the upbeat momentum to the synergistic effects of existing and incremental policies, highlighting the implementation of a more proactive fiscal policy and a moderately loose monetary policy this year.

Delivery Sector Growth

The courier sector experienced rapid expansion in the first two months of 2025, with significant growth in delivery volume and capability-building, according to an industry index released by the State Post Bureau.

The express delivery development index was 368.6 during the period, an increase of 11.8 percent compared to the same period last year, according to the bureau.

The index is compiled based on data from major logistics firms operating delivery services. It reflects the overall business activities and trends in the country's courier sector.

China's express delivery volume remained high throughout the first two months, as the sector entered one of its busiest periods during the Spring Festival holiday from January 28 to February 4. During the holiday, the business volume of express delivery enterprises reached 1.15 billion parcels, a year-on-year increase of 31 percent.

The sub-index for development strength also improved during the period, as related enterprises focused on building logistics infrastructure, expanding delivery channels and achieving breakthroughs in unmanned delivery vehicles, the bureau said.

Capital Inflow

China's foreign exchange (forex) market operated steadily in February, with a net inflow of cross-border capital, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) showed.

The net inflow of cross-border capital from the trade in goods reached $64.8 billion that month, remaining relatively high compared to the same period in previous years, said Li Bin, deputy head of the administration.

Additionally, foreign holdings of domestic bonds and stocks increased by a net total of $12.7 billion, according to Li.

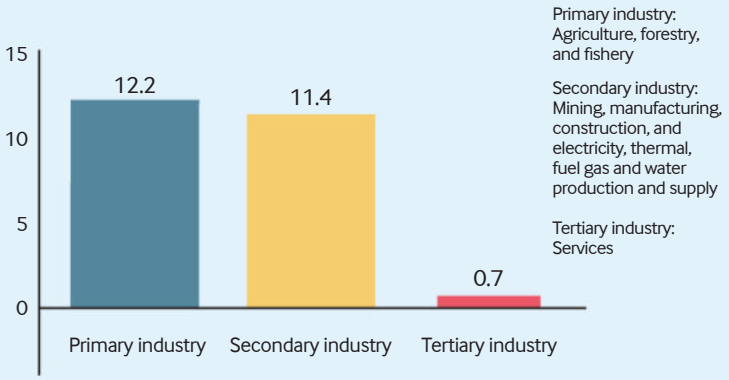
In February, the forex settlement of Chinese banks showed a balanced trend, Li said. "Market expectations and transactions remained rational and orderly, with an overall balance of forex supply and demand in the domestic market," he added.

He said the forex market will

NUMBERS

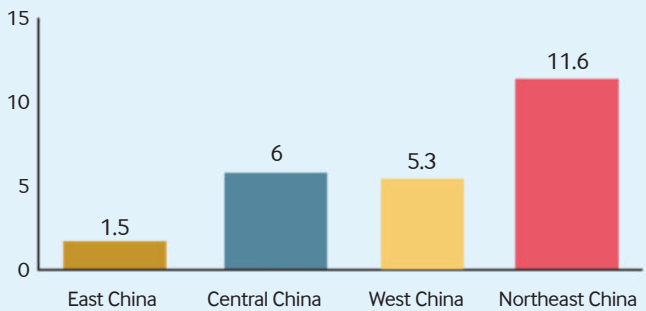
Fixed Assets Investment Growth by Sector

Jan-Feb (% y.o.y.)



Fixed Assets Investment Growth by Region

Jan-Feb (% y.o.y.)



continue to operate on a stable trajectory, thanks to the country's proactive macroeconomic measures to boost consumption and investment, its commitment to high-level opening up, and the market's increasing resilience.

Cash-Pooling Program

China will expand the coverage of a pilot cash-pooling service that integrates domestic and foreign currency management for multinational companies, the country's monetary authorities said on March 13.

The program is being piloted in 10 localities and will be expanded to various regions, including Tianjin Municipality, Hebei, Anhui, Fujian, Shandong, Hunan, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, according to the People's Bank of China (PBC), the country's central bank, and SAFE.

The move aims to improve the efficiency of cross-border fund operations and facilitate cross-border investment and financing for large multinationals to a greater extent, the PBC said in a statement.

Policies that will be piloted in these additional regions include those that allow multinationals to use their master accounts in China to handle centralized receipts and payments in domestic and foreign currencies for overseas subsidiaries, and those that streamline yuan-denominated cross-border receipts and payments for multinationals.

The cash-pooling service was first launched in Beijing and the southern economic powerhouse of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province in 2021. It was expanded to include Shanghai Municipality, Guangdong and Shaanxi provinces and other regions in 2022, and optimized further in 2024.

SME Development Index

The small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) development index, an index tracking the development of China's SMEs rose 0.8 points from the previous month to 89.8 in February, according to the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises.

In terms of sectors, sub-indices for the industry, transport, real estate, wholesale and retail sales, social services and information transmission software sectors grew 0.7, 0.5, 0.4, 1.1, 0.5 and 0.8 points, respectively.

In terms of regions, the sub-indices for the eastern, central, western and northeastern regions stood at 90.6, 90.5, 88.9 and 81.8, up 0.9, 0.6, 0.8 and 0.8 points, respectively.

In China, more than 90 percent of private companies are SMEs, and more than 90 percent of SMEs are private companies.

In-car Digital Ecosystem

German carmaker BMW said on March 17 it will work with Chinese tech giant Huawei to develop an in-car digital ecosystem specifically tailored for the Chinese market.

According to the German auto behemoth, this cooperation means a deep integration with Huawei's HarmonyOS NEXT, the company's self-developed operating system that was built independent of the Android architecture.

Built upon the operating system, BMW's digital key functionality is set to debut later this year, allowing users to unlock, lock and start their vehicles using Huawei smartphones. Additionally, the integration with a Huawei smart interconnection solution will debut in 2026 on BMW's locally produced next-generation electric models, the *Neue Klasse* (New Class).

The German company has approximately 460 local supplier partners in China and is accelerating collaboration with Chinese technology partners, particularly in cutting-edge technologies such as large language models, generative AI and intelligent voice interaction.

(Source: *National Bureau of Statistics*)

XINHUA

PALESTINE

A man inspects a building damaged by an Israeli airstrike in a residential area of Gaza City on March 18

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Protesters demanding the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol set up tents and stage a sit-in demonstration in Gwanghwamun Square, Seoul, on March 18

XINHUA

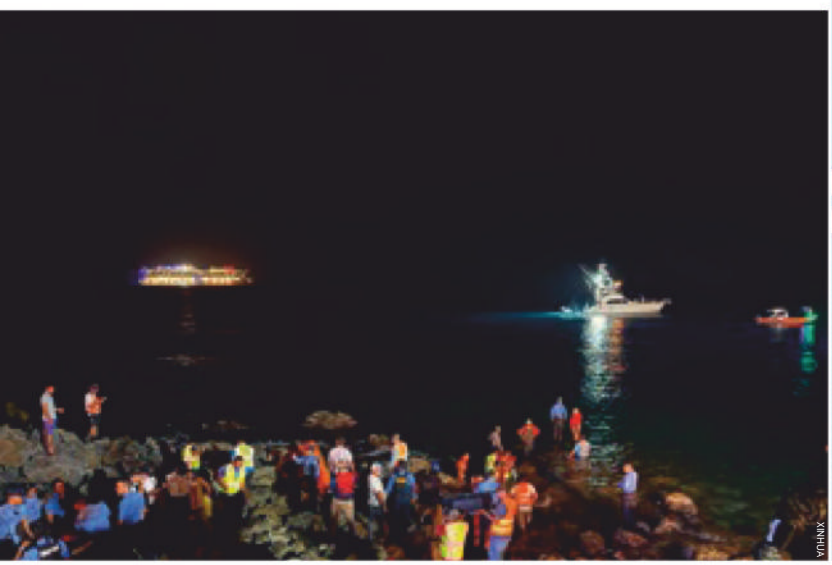
XINHUA

GERMANY

Visitors taste wines from Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in China, at the 2025 International Trade Fair for Wines and Spirits in Düsseldorf, on March 16

HONDURAS

Rescue workers search near the site of a plane crash on Roatán Island on March 17. A small aircraft carrying at least 15 people crashed earlier that same day. The accident claimed six lives



UNITED KINGDOM

Shi Yuqi of China wins the men's singles final at the All England Open Badminton Championships in Birmingham on March 16

YEMEN

Tens of thousands of people gather in the Houthi-controlled capital of Sanaa on March 17, to protest against U.S. airstrikes in the country

NEW HEAD OF CHINA CDC

Veteran virologist **Wang Jianwei** has been appointed director general and president of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC).

Wang specializes in the pathogenic mechanisms and prevention of respiratory viral infections. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wang led a research team that elucidated the virus's epidemiological characteristics, which laid the groundwork for effective pandemic decision making and the development of diagnostics, vaccines and treatments.

Wang has received support from several prestigious talent programs, including the National Outstanding Youth Science Fund. He has published a number of academic papers in major international journals such as *Cell* and *The Lancet*, and his research findings were recognized as one of the Top 10 Advances in Life Sciences in China in 2020.

Inheritors of Industry

People's Daily

March 18

Across China, family-run factories are being passed on to a new generation of young entrepreneurs, collectively known as *chang er dai*, or "second-generation factory owners." The term generally refers to the children of entrepreneurs who started up their own private manufacturing businesses in the decades following China's adoption of the reform and opening-up policy in 1978.

Unlike their self-made parents, the second-generation factory owners have been raised with ready access to quality education. The fact that they have grown up in an era of rapid economic growth and digital transformation means that this younger generation is more open to new technologies and capable of adapting to shifting trends in the global economy.

Compared to first-generation entrepreneurs, who often encountered language and cultural barriers when dealing with international companies, the highly educated younger generation harbors a more global perspective and is therefore taking the lead in driving the overseas expansion of Chinese businesses.

These young successors are also profoundly reshaping workplace culture by introducing a more modern and human-centered approach to business management, one that values employee wellbeing, work-life balance and flexible work arrangements.

Ports to Prosperity

Outlook Weekly

March 17

Bordered by the Bohai Sea to the east and encircling Beijing and Tianjin, Hebei Province has a 487-km coastline and governs over 7,200 square km of maritime area. In recent years, its three major ports—Qinhuangdao Port, Tangshan Port and Huanghua Port—have risen to become key portals for international trade and the nationwide distribution of energy resources and raw materials.

The province is integrating itself

"We are ready to continue to provide assistance within our capacity according to the wishes of parties involved, which of course includes post-war reconstruction."

Li Ming, spokesperson for China International Development Cooperation Agency, at a press briefing on March 17, in response to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's February call for China's help in restoring peace and reconstruction in Ukraine

"The big cities of China, like Beijing, have significantly reduced pollution. The air is now clean and fresh. Large lakes such as Dianchi Lake in Kunming and West Lake in Hangzhou have been cleaned up, and the water systems are fantastic."

Erik Solheim, former UN Under Secretary General, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency, emphasizing China's rapid strides in ecological development and green technology have become a global example of sustainable progress

into the Belt and Road Initiative, a China-proposed initiative to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes, by building a logistics network that connects Beijing and its neighboring regions to the global community. Every day, freight trains loaded with goods depart from Huanghua Port for Europe, and Qinhuangdao Port has become an important gateway between China and the Republic of Korea.

Hebei has also been committed to the sustainable development of its ports by leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things. The province is accelerating the digital transformation of its ports, with Huanghua Port standing out as the world's first fully automated port for coal transportation.

According to the blueprint set out by the local government, the province aims to establish itself as a leading coastal industrial powerhouse by 2027. By that time, Hebei's GDP is expected to surpass 2 trillion yuan ($277 billion), which will position this rapidly developing region as a key driver of economic growth in the Bohai Sea Rim.

Identifying AI

Legal Daily

March 19

With its ability to generate human-like text, images and videos, generative AI provides powerful tools to streamline content creation. However, these tools have also turned the Internet into a breeding ground for fake news and misinformation.

To address this issue, the Cyberspace Administration of China and three other government departments have recently issued a new set of rules requiring Internet service providers to label AI-generated content.

The new regulation, which will come into effect in September, requires all synthetic content to be labeled, either explicitly in its description or implicitly via metadata encoding. The former functions like a visible signature by allowing users to quickly identify AI-generated or modified content, whereas the latter ensures traceability and also protects the copyright of original creators.

These rules offer a Chinese solution for managing the many risks associated with AI-generated content. Looking ahead, as generative AI continues to evolve and permeate more corners of modern life, these regulations need to be constantly upgraded to keep up with the speed of technological advancements and to ensure that AI becomes a robust driver of social progress and human wellbeing.

PROPERTY TYCOON DIES AT 97

Lee Shau-kee, founder of Hong Kong's Henderson Land Development and one of the most successful Chinese entrepreneurs ever, died on March 17 at the age of 97.

Born into a merchant family in Shunde, Guangdong Province, in 1928, Lee started his business in Hong Kong in his 20s and established Henderson in 1976.

Lee's decades-long success in real estate development and investment made him one of the wealthiest people in the world. In 1996, he was ranked by *Forbes* as the fourth richest person globally, with a total fortune of $12.7 billion.

Lee was also celebrated for his charitable works. His charity foundations have supported students and universities throughout Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, promoting educational development.

On March 17, John Lee Ka-chiu, Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, released a statement mourning his death, saying he had made significant contributions to Hong Kong's economic development, as well as the city's prosperity and stability.

"The fair, transparent and predictable investment environment fostered by the Chinese Government has facilitated foreign enterprises better tapping into the vast potential of the Chinese market."

Fang Juntao, Senior Vice President of Nestlé Greater China, in a recent interview with Xinhua, applauding the latest Chinese government work report and a series of policy measures introduced by top government bodies to create more development opportunities and strengthen the confidence of foreign investors

"Xenotransplantation could be a key way to solve the organ shortage problem and offer new hope for many patients."

Dou Kefeng, a scientist specializing in organ transplantation, as his research team from Xijing Hospital of the Air Force Medical University recently successfully transplanted a genetically engineered pig kidney into a uremic patient, a major clinical milestone in cross-species organ transplantation

COVER STORY

FROM SERFDOM TO FREEDOM

A journey from serving masters to serving the people By Li Nan

Padma was 17 when the democratic reform was introduced in Xizang in 1959. Before the reform, the region had been ruled by feudal serfdom under a theocracy for centuries. Nearly 1 million serfs were subjected to estate-holders' cruel exploitation and oppression. Padma was one of them.

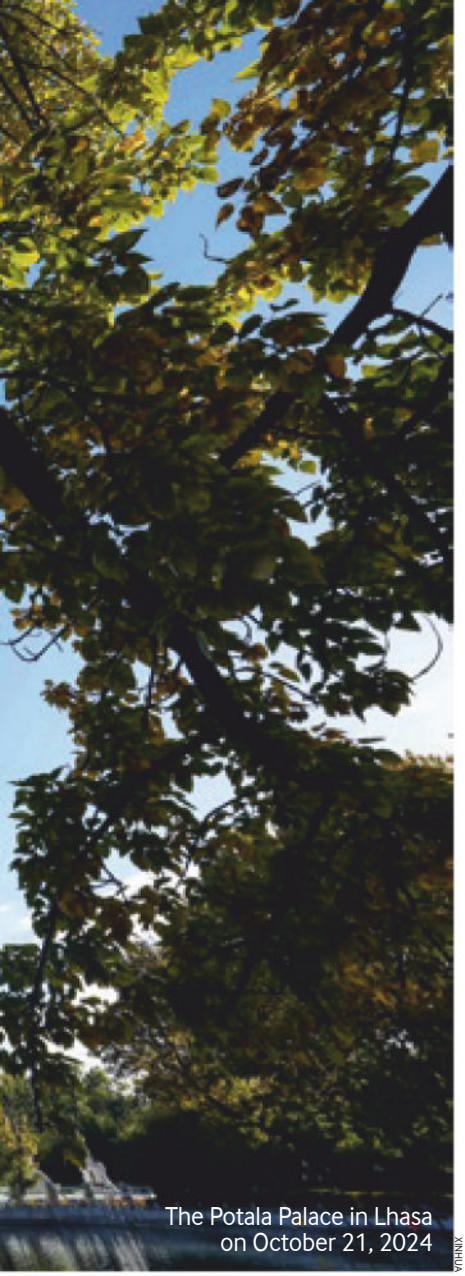
Born into a serf family in Xainza County, Nagqu, in north Xizang, Padma spent his adolescent years working as a houseboy for "Masters" in a local noble family. "I rarely got enough food to eat," Padma told *Beijing Review*. In winter, he was not given warm shoes and the only way to keep his feet warm was to wrap them up in rags. He thought at the time he would serve the noble family for his whole life.

A turning point

The turning point came in 1959 when feudal serfdom was abolished as part of the democratic reform and approximately 1 million serfs were emancipated. The reform abolished the feudal bondage of individual serfs to serf owners, not only granting serfs personal freedom and equal rights, but also providing them land, livestock and other means of production to improve their socioeconomic status.

"Everything changed. We are no longer slaves for masters. Instead, we've become masters of our own lives," Padma told *Beijing Review*. After the reform, he received professional training and became a village veterinarian in 1963. "We work for ourselves and get paid. The more we work, the more we gain," he added.

The reform also enabled former serfs to have a say in public affairs. In 1970, Xainza County established a democratic reform committee and Padma was elected deputy director. "Before the democratic reform, the



The Potala Palace in Lhasa on October 21, 2024

XINHUA

wealthy had supreme power whereas the poor people had no political rights. It's the reform that granted us political rights and we are now free to speak our minds without fearing the wealthy," Padma said.

In 1973, Padma became a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC). "I joined the Party to serve the people. And I did everything I could for the people," Padma said. Thanks to his outstanding performance, he was appointed as the Secretary of the CPC Gaitso Township Committee one year later.

After he took the position, he faced a challenge: There were not enough pastures for the increasing number of livestock in their county and herders sometimes fought over access to grasslands. In pursuit of new grazing lands, Padma in 1976 led 60 households to relocate further north to the uninhabited grasslands in Changtang, which is now Gaitso Township in Shuanghu County. The new town has an altitude of 4,900 meters and is 718 km away from Lhasa, capital city of Xizang.

The Shuanghu Office, an administrative organization, and the Gaitso People's Commune were established in the same year. A distribution system was set up in the commune, under which individual income was allocated based on each person's contribution, measured in work points. With Padma as the leader, residents started from scratch, and eked out a living on the once-uninhabitable land.

In 1982, after the launch of reform and opening up in China, people's communes across Xizang were dissolved and the household contract responsibility system, under which the farmland owned by the village collectives was contracted out to individual households, was implemented. In the next year, residents of Gaitso People's Commune held meetings to discuss their future direction. Some 70 percent of the residents voted to keep the people's commune as they believed that collective operations are more effective and efficient in the vast grassland.

Over the following decades, the commune's villagers have continually optimized the distribution system based on the principle of "more pay for more work." As a result, the commune has worked well and continues to operate to this day. Thanks to their collective efforts, the commune's per-capita disposable income has been higher than the average of the whole region for decades. In 1989, Padma was awarded the title of National Model Worker for his outstanding performance.

In the following years, more and more herders moved onto the Changtang grassland. And in 2012, a decade after Padma had retired, the Shuanghu Office was updated into a county-level government to better serve those living in Changtang. Shuanghu is now the youngest and highest county in China.

To this day, Gaitso remains the only people's commune in Xizang. In 2024, the per-capita disposable income of the commune was 28,500 yuan ($3,939), 23 percent higher than the national average for rural residents.

A difficult decision

Nevertheless, life is not a fairytale and new challenges arise in Shuanghu residents' lives.

Shuanghu County sits at an average altitude of over 5,000 meters, with oxygen levels only 40 percent of those at sea level. Due to its remote location and harsh environment, Shuanghu residents constantly faced challenges such as difficulty accessing clean drinking water, medical care and transportation. In many remote villages, people had to rely on melting ice for daily water needs.

The county experiences a high incidence of plateau-related diseases such as rheumatism and heart disease, with an average life expectancy of just 58 years—about 14.5 years lower than the average in Xizang. In 2024, Xizang's average life expectancy increased from 35.5 years prior to 1959 to 72.5 years, more than doubling.

What's more, Changtang is home to nearly 500 species of plants, as well as endangered wild animals unique to the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau. These include the Tibetan wild ass, wild yak, Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan brown bear, black-necked crane, snow leopard and Tibetan antelope.

In 1993, the Changtang Nature Reserve was established and was upgraded into a regional-level reserve by the Xizang Autonomous Regional Government. Seven years later, on April 4, 2000, it was upgraded to a national nature reserve. Covering a total area of 29.8 million hectares in Xizang and Qinghai Province, it is the largest nature reserve in China and the second-largest terrestrial nature reserve in the world, second only to the Northeast Greenland National Park in Greenland. ▶▶

As the population grew in Changtang, competition for space between humans, livestock and wildlife became increasingly prominent. At the end of 2019, in an effort to resolve the challenge of human-nature coexistence and provide more space for wildlife, and ensure a better life for residents, the local government persuaded Shuanghu residents to relocate south to Singpori Village in Gonggar County, Shannan City, on the north bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo River.

"Life in Shuanghu was tough, but after working hard to build our home for over 40 years, it was hard to leave. At first, I didn't want to move," said Padma. However, realizing that the relocation was for the greater good, Padma and 2,900 other villagers agreed to migrate to Singpori, marking their second major relocation in life.

The new settlement, located just over 10 km from Lhasa Gonggar International Airport and about 60 km from Lhasa City, was equipped with rows of newly built Tibetan-style houses funded by the government. The site also featured a well-equipped hospital, school, market and convenient transportation.

Singpori sits at a much lower altitude—over 1,400 meters lower than Shuanghu. After moving, many villagers noticed that winter in Singpori felt like summer in Shuanghu. The warmer weather made breathing easier, sleep more sound and daily life more convenient.

Some younger people have found jobs or started up small businesses in nearby industrial parks while others remain in the old settlement in Shuanghu, taking care of their livestock. Herding will be phased out of the Changtang National Nature Reserve gradually in upcoming years.

Better medical care

For Padma, now 83 years old and with limited mobility, Singpori is a much better place to enjoy retirement. With running water available and a clean toilet inside the house, everyday life became significantly easier.

And what's more important for him is that he now has easier access to medical care in the new settlement. When he lived in Shuanghu, the nearest county-level hospital was 70 km away from his village. Now, a new hospital is within walking distance.

Many people, like Padma, have benefited from the development of Xizang's healthcare system. Across the region, there are now 1,821 medical and health institutions with a total of 22,000 hospital beds.

The immunization coverage rate in Xizang has remained above 90 percent for many years, and eligible women can receive free HPV

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Padma (center) takes a cup of butter tea offered by his granddaughter Samkhar Yudron in Singpori Village in Gonggar County, Shannan City, Xizang Autonomous Region, on March 27, 2024

XINHUA

Tibetan medicine processing master Phuchung Tsering (second right) teaches students how to distinguish different Tibetan medicinal herbs in Lhasa on April 20, 2023

vaccinations. The implementation of child nutrition programs has significantly enhanced the health conditions of children in the region.

Many common plateau diseases have been brought under control—iodine deficiency disorders have been nearly eliminated, and there have been no new cases of Kashin-Beck disease since 2018. The prevalence of echinococcosis has also significantly declined.

This progress in healthcare would have been impossible without the support of the medical aid program for Xizang. Since the 1990s, medical workers from renowned hospitals across the nation have signed up to work in Xizang to accelerate the development of medical and health services in the region.

Since 2015, medical assistance to Xizang has been intensified with medical teams from top hospitals in the most economically advanced cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in Guangdong Province arriving in the region. The eight biggest hospitals in Xizang had all of their departments team up with corresponding departments in top-notch hospitals in other parts of China. The arrangement aims to develop the expertise of Xizang's hospitals so that they can also qualify as top-notch hospitals. It also means patients don't have to look for treatment outside the region, saving them money as well as time.

"This kind of medical aid for Xizang has enhanced both life quality and sense of happiness in the region," Nyima, Vice President of Lhasa People's Hospital and a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, told *Beijing Review*. "Every (visiting) team is comprised of doctors from different departments. They don't come just to perform surgeries or treat patients. Through mentorship programs, they have also trained many local doctors, leaving behind a skilled team that will never leave," she added.

By the end of 2024, 184 hospitals from other provinces and municipalities had sent nearly 2,000 experts to assist Xizang's healthcare sector. They introduced more than 4,400 new medical projects and technologies, filling over 2,500 gaps in the region's medical expertise.

At the same time, Tibetan traditional medicine has also seen remarkable growth in recent years. Currently, Xizang has over 5,200 specialized Tibetan medicine professionals, 51 Tibetan medicine institutions, full coverage of Tibetan medicine services at the community level, and a service coverage rate exceeding 94 percent in townships. The Tibetan Hospital of Xizang Autonomous Region, founded in 1916, has developed into the country's largest Tibetan medicine hospital integrating medical treatment, teaching, scientific research, prevention, health care and Tibetan medicine preparation.

On December 19, 2024, the inauguration ceremony for the National Traditional Medicine Center (Tibetan Medicine) was held in Lhasa. This is the first national-level ethnic medicine center officially in China.

The center will focus on common critical illnesses in high altitude regions, integrating medical care, education, research and industrial development. It aims to establish a high-quality medical center specializing in stroke treatment and Tibetan medicinal bathing therapy while promoting the development of other medical disciplines.

"In my 31 years as a doctor, I have witnessed the transformation of Xizang's healthcare system—from having few medical institutions to many, from a small medical workforce to a large one, and from weak medical capabilities to strong ones," Nyima said.

Access to healthcare is an essential foundation for people's pursuit of a better life, Tashi Dondrop, President of the Ali Prefecture Tibetan Hospital said. **BR**

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Comments to linan@bjreview.com

COVER STORY

LOGISTICS ON THE PLATEAU

Modern logistics transforms life on the roof of the world By Wang Ruohan

He Haiyan, a courier for YTO Express, one of China's leading logistics and express delivery companies, picked up a package of fresh yak meat from a specialty store in Lhasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, on March 7. After air transport, the meat would reach its destination 2,000 km away in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, within 48 hours.

Twelve years ago, He never imagined his career would be closely tied to the development of Xizang's logistics industry. Today, he skillfully weaves through the streets of Lhasa, greeting locals in fluent Tibetan, connecting recipients thousands of miles away.

Service expansion

In 2013, He's family settled in Lhasa when he decided to move there in search of opportunities. Originally from Qingyang in Gansu Province—2,600 km away from Lhasa—he was drawn to the city by its growing prospects. A friend suggested he join the express delivery industry, which he believed held great potential. He immediately contacted YTO Express in Lhasa and became a full-time employee.

His journey in Xizang, however, was not without its challenges. Upon arrival, He experienced severe altitude sickness—headaches and nausea plagued him. The drastic temperature differences between day and night, coupled with intense UV radiation, made adaptation difficult. The language barrier was another hurdle, as many customers speak Tibetan rather than standard Chinese, which made communication challenging.

But He has two advantages—he is hardworking and eager to learn. "To better serve local customers and improve communication efficiency, I learned basic Tibetan phrases. To cope with local environment, I carry warm clothing in case of temperature fluctuations and wear a hat when going out to protect myself from UV rays," he told *Beijing Review*.

Over the past 12 years, He has not only overcome numerous challenges but also earned the title of Outstanding Employee of YTO Express multiple times.

He's growth parallels with the development of Xizang's logistics sector. "When I joined YTO Express in 2013, our warehouse was just 200 square meters. Operations were mostly manual, and our delivery range was limited to the urban area. Today, our warehouse has expanded to 2,200 square meters with fully automated sorting. Our logistics network now covers counties, towns, and even villages," He said.

According to the Postal Administration of Xizang Autonomous Region (PAXAR), the region's postal delivery volume reached 203 million items in 2024, a 5.88-percent increase from the previous year; revenue from postal services was 1.21 billion yuan ($169.62 million), up 19.06 percent. Express delivery volume reached 30.47 million items, growing 23.27 percent, with revenue of 812 million yuan ($114 million), a 22.4-percent increase.

"With the growth of e-commerce, YTO Express's Lhasa branch has partnered with other e-commerce platforms to offer more shopping choices and convenience for local residents. We have also established air and road transportation networks connecting multiple cities in other parts of China to Lhasa, ensuring timely and stable deliveries," He added.

Logistics not only provides Xizang residents with a wide range of products, but also enables the plateau's specialty products to reach markets across the country, creating a two-way flow. "Over 2 billion yuan ($281 million) in agricultural and specialty products sales from Xizang were realized through express delivery in 2023 and 2024. Additionally, demand for fresh products, such as plateau yak meat and sheep meat, as well as high-value items like matsutake mushrooms, has increased, further boosting express delivery volume and raising income for local farmers and herders," Tu Chunyan, Director of the General Service Office of the PAXAR told *Beijing Review*.

New development

The modernization of Xizang's logistics system is becoming an increasingly important driver of consumption upgrades, improved

COURTESY PHOTO

He Haiyan, a courier for YTO Express, collects packages in Lhasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, on March 19

living standards, and the strengthening of industrial foundations.

To further enhance postal services' support for the development of cultural and tourism industries, Xizang now has five "Heavenly Xizang" themed post offices, such as the Potala Palace and Qomolangma post offices, as windows for tourism promotion. Xizang's postal and express delivery industries have developed over 120 types of postcards, more than 60 philatelic products, and over 200 cultural and creative products. These are being sold through themed post offices, introducing more than 70 types of local agricultural products and 200 varieties of ethnic handicrafts, expanding sales channels for local specialties and contributing to rural revitalization, allowing Xizang's culture and products to reach broader markets.

The green development concept has also taken root in Xizang's logistics industry, which is accelerating its transition to eco-friendly and low-carbon operations. The industry is exploring green development through the use of new energy vehicles, promoting recyclable packaging materials, and optimizing delivery routes to reduce energy consumption and environmental pollution. According to the PAXAR, in 2024, postal companies used 1.54 million green packaging boxes. In response to national plastic reduction policies, biodegradable plastics were promoted, with 79,400 rolls of biodegradable tape and 346,500 biodegradable plastic packing bags purchased in 2024, contributing to the protection of Xizang's plateau ecosystem.

Science and technology innovation is helping Xizang's logistics break through bottlenecks. For example, YTO Express has introduced unmanned delivery vehicles in certain areas of Xizang. This technological innovation not only reduces labor costs and alleviates delivery difficulties but also significantly improves delivery efficiency and accuracy.

Xizang's cross-border logistics business is also experiencing rapid growth, bringing the plateau closer to the world. According to the PAXAR, in 2024, cross-border logistics volume surged. Major exports through postal delivery included agricultural products and handicrafts, boosting trade between Xizang and surrounding countries and regions, enhancing regional economic cooperation, and increasing demand for cross-border express services.

The construction of smart customs has also provided an efficient channel for Xizang products to "go global." Lhasa Customs has accelerated the development of smart customs systems, improving cross-border express clearance efficiency. According to Lhasa Customs, Xizang's foreign trade reached 12.67 billion yuan ($1.78 billion) in 2024, a remarkable year-on-year increase of 15.4 percent, demonstrating the vitality of an open economy.

Xizang's logistics industry now has a widespread network, becoming an increasingly important part of both China's and the global logistic landscapes.

This transformation has reinforced He's determination to remain rooted in Xizang. "I have witnessed the rapid development of the express delivery industry in Xizang. This plateau is not just my workplace; it has become my home. I believe that as the logistics network continues to improve, my career will also have broader prospects here," he said. **BR**

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Comments to wangruohan@cicgamericas.com

COVER STORY

WHERE THE SKY MEETS THE EARTH

Safeguarding the ecological environment of the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau

By Kang Caiqi

With an average elevation of over 4,500 meters and spanning 2.5 million square km, the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau is the highest and largest plateau on Earth, earning it the title the "roof of the world." Unsurprisingly, the plateau is home to exceptional biodiversity, making it one of the most biologically rich geographical regions in the world. It supports nearly 6,000 species of higher plants, with 1,000 of them being endemic.

This fertile and enigmatic land has long attracted curious explorers and researchers from home and abroad.

Among them is Laqiong, a botanist and professor of botany at the School of Ecology and Environment, Xizang University. With over 30 years of experience in ecological research, he has dedicated himself to preserving the diverse ecosystems of the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau.

Over the past decade, he and his team have traversed the plateau, covering nearly 600,000 km to fully survey the biological wealth of this remarkable land and collecting over 40 million plant seeds.

Rising to the challenge

"Each plant species requires 5,000 samples, while endangered species typically need 500. To preserve genetic diversity, these 5,000 seeds must be collected from multiple locations rather than a single site. Additionally, the distance between any two collection sites must be at least 50 km," Laqiong told *Beijing Review*.

Working on a plateau exceeding 4,000 meters in altitude presents immense challenges and inherent risks. The footprints of Laqiong and his team can be found across the snow-capped mountains, river valleys, forests and barren sands of the plateau. "Just to collect seeds of the cudweed saw-wort (a plant that usually grows on mountain slopes and rocky screes at elevations between 2,700 and 5,700 meters—*Ed.*), we traveled across both the northern and southern slopes of Mount Qomolangma. Ultimately, we collected them on the northern slope at an altitude of over 6,000 meters, reaching the highest sampling point ever recorded by Chinese botanists," he said.

The rugged and complex terrain is just one of the many challenges the team faces. The plateau's climate is highly unpredictable—at elevations above 5,400 meters, temperatures can shift rapidly, resulting in the phenomenon of experiencing "all four seasons in a single day." "One moment, the sun shines brightly; minutes later, it's snowing, only for the skies to clear again soon after," Laqiong recalled. On top of this, altitude sickness is a constant struggle. "Even for someone like me, born and raised in Xizang, it can be overwhelming. I often experience severe dizziness, especially when traveling to the highest-altitude areas," he added.

On the vast plateau, the team occasionally travels up to 800 km in a single day. They typically depart at 5 or 6 a.m. and arrive at their campsite around 9 or 10 p.m. After reaching their destination, they spend several hours sorting specimens. As a result, sleeping only two or three hours each night has become the norm for them during field surveys.

Noah's Ark for seeds

According to Laqiong, Xizang's ecological baseline and integrity are relatively well-preserved, yet the ecosystem remains fragile overall. Its structure and functions are quite simple, making it highly sensitive to global changes, with limited resistance to disturbances and a reduced capacity for natural recovery. Once damaged, it is difficult to restore the ecosystem naturally. Therefore, building an ecological barrier for the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau and improving its ecological resilience is a long-term and essential task.

Currently, both human activity and climate change have pushed many plateau plants to the brink of

extinction. "We go to great lengths to collect these seeds so that if climate change one day threatens certain plateau species with extinction, future generations can use them to restore plant populations through artificial means—saving not only endangered species but, ultimately, humanity itself," he explained.

He further said, from a basic perspective, these plants have inherent medicinal value; from a broader viewpoint, the survival of a single plant species is crucial to maintaining the health of the entire ecosystem.

To date, they have extracted cancer-fighting compounds from one species of juniper they collected, which were certified by the American Pharmacists Association. They also discovered thale cress in the snow-covered region, providing valuable data for global botanical research. Additionally, they registered over 30,000 remaining specimens of Tibetan cypress, establishing a protective barrier for these rare trees.

Opening the treasure box

In 2019, Laqiong's research team conducted the first whole-genome sequencing of Himalayan rock cress, a plant unique to the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau. This was the first such study conducted on wild plants from the region. In terms of the next phase, Laqiong stressed the conservation and utilization of the plateau's original germplasm resources. Germplasm refers to a collection of genes for use in the improvement of plants. "These biological resources in Xizang must be not only well protected but also effectively explored and utilized," he said.

Famous German medical skincare brand Eucerin once approached Xizang University to seek collaboration. They hypothesized that plants exposed to Xizang's intense ultraviolet (UV) radiation likely contain potent UV-resistant compounds. Hoping to extract these active ingredients to inhibit melanin production in the skin, they proposed a joint research project. Laqiong readily agreed, believing that Xizang's biological resources should be used to boost local livelihoods and benefit the community.

The university has also established multiple partnerships with enterprises in the biopharmaceutical sector, generating considerable social and economic benefits. It has also created a Tibetan medicinal resource bank and a high-altitude microbial resource bank, where researchers identify genes associated with properties such as radiation resistance, hypoxia tolerance, and cold and drought resistance. These discoveries not only enhance agricultural practices and livestock breeding but also offer insights into radiation protection for high-altitude residents and astronauts.

Laqiong has dedicated much effort to the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau germplasm resource bank. This initiative not only focuses on collecting genetic resources from plateau-specific plants, animals and microorganisms, but also involves the creation of a human genetic resource repository for the region. The goal is to provide strategic support for the conservation and study of the plateau's local populations. This undertaking plays a crucial role in understanding the genetic traits of plateau populations, regulating their adaptation to low-oxygen environments and advancing research into the prevention of high-altitude maladies. **BR**

COURTESY PHOTO

Laqiong (right), a botanist and professor of botany at the School of Ecology and Environment, Xizang University, and his team members collect plant seeds on the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau in July 2023

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Comments to kangcaiqi@cicgamericas.com

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BRIDGING THE PACIFIC

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Classrooms in the Cloud

By Zhang Yunhan

At the No.1 Middle School in Namling County, Xizang Autonomous Region, located at an altitude of over 4,000 meters, students now access video teaching materials through the Xizang Education Zhufeng Qiyun platform. The platform, and the computer-filled classrooms students use to access it, are part of the region's ongoing efforts to digitalize education. With the rapid advancement of digital technology, the establishment of a "cloud classroom," which brings together diverse online courses, narrows the educational resource gap between regions, and urban and rural areas. It also offers a model for improving educational equity around the world.

Resource sharing

The core challenge of educational equity is the spatial imbalance and temporal lag in resource allocation. Under the traditional education model, high-quality teaching staff, curriculum resources and teaching tools are heavily concentrated in urban and economically developed areas. In contrast, remote regions have long suffered from "educational isolation" due to geographical barriers and inadequate infrastructure. The essence of technology-enabled education is to use digital means to reshape the spatio-temporal distribution of educational resources, allowing them to transcend physical limitations and create a new paradigm of "cloud-based sharing."

The rapid advancement of digital infrastructure has transformed the vision into a tangible reality. By the end of 2023, the Internet access rate of primary and secondary schools in China had reached 100 percent and the coverage of multimedia classrooms had exceeded 99 percent. Even in the remote mountainous areas of the less developed Guizhou Province, for example, primary school students can join the same English class as their urban peers through live-streaming. The Teach in Tandem model further enhances this by enabling teachers as distant as Beijing and Lhasa, the capital of Xizang that is more than 3,500 km away from Beijing, to collaborate on lesson planning and delivery, and allowing students from both locations to participate in the same class simultaneously.

Leveraging digitalization, a single high-quality teaching resource can be efficiently replicated and disseminated at scale, achieving rapid and widespread adoption. The Western China MOOC Teacher Training Program 2.0 online platform provides 198,000 MOOC (massive open online course) classes and customized courses, with annual visits by students of universities in west China reaching 540 million.

The Xizang Education Zhufeng Qiyun platform integrates diverse teaching and research materials from top-notch teachers in the autonomous region and even from across the country with unique Tibetan-language teaching aids. Teachers and students in Xizang can use these resources for free. In this way, the sharing of educational resources is realized, empowering individuals to learn anytime, anywhere and from anyone.

Non-profit education

Fueled by hi-tech innovations, the concept of teaching students according to their aptitudes is advancing toward scaled

personalized education. AI algorithms convert traditional one-to-many teaching into one-to-one learning support. This transformation not only enhances the pertinence and effectiveness of education but also greatly enriches teaching methods and strategies.

In March 2025, teachers at the No.2 High School in Nyingchi City in Xizang began using an AI-empowered evaluation technology. This technology captures in-class details like student engagement and response, as well as learning outcomes. On this basis, it provides a critical foundation for matching course content, adjusting teaching strategies, customizing learning plans and delivering targeted resources.

In 2023, China launched the first

Primary school students in Tingri County, Xizang Autonomous Region, join a chorus online with peers from Beijing and Chengdu at the commencement ceremony of their spring semester on March 5

XINHUA

phase of its Digital Volunteer Teaching Innovation Experiment program, delivering over 2,500 courses in science, art and other subjects to 14,000 rural primary and middle school students. The non-profit Online Tutoring Together program has mobilized college student volunteers from more than 560 universities across the country to provide accompanying education such as reading, sports and cultural expansion for rural students.

The UNESCO Strategy on Technological Innovation in Education (2022-25) program underscores that it supports human-centered innovation in the use of technologies for education to help ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Central to this vision is prioritizing technological support for the most marginalized groups, where AI technology once again demonstrates its unique advantages. Advanced technologies like computer vision-based emotion recognition algorithms can dynamically adapt teaching pace to meet the needs of special education students, thereby boosting their classroom participation. In a pilot project at a special education school in Beijing, the classroom participation of students with autism was significantly improved by the use of these technologies.

Global impact

Digital technology facilitates the pursuit of the universal value of educational equity and offers a new development paradigm for building a global community of shared future in education. This digital transformation is not only the application of technology in specific countries, but also a process of human pursuit of education for all.

China's digital education model provides a new framework for global education governance through technological innovation, institutional reform and cultural integration. In Ethiopia, Chinese tech firm Huawei has supported 300 primary and secondary schools by building smart campus networks featuring high-bandwidth Internet access, Wi-Fi coverage and simplified management and maintenance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NetDragon, a Chinese operator of massively multiplayer online games, built online learning communities for students in the United States, Thailand, Egypt, Serbia and other countries. It also supported local governments by providing online teacher training and basic education services.

China initiated the establishment of the World Digital Education Alliance at the 2024 World Digital Education Conference and launched the international version of its National Smart Education Public Service Platform. This platform gathers high-quality educational resources from around the world, supports multiple languages and enables learners from different countries to access personalized educational services.

The right to education, as one of the fundamental human rights, is directly related to the individual's right to development and the overall progress of society. In the digital and intelligent age, technology has emerged as a crucial tool for advancing educational equity and upholding human rights. However, significant challenges remain, such as disparities in access to digital devices and networks and variations in the quality of educational resources. This requires further integration of technologies such as AI and 5G, as well as a deeper combination of technological tools with the concern for humanity, thereby achieving the ultimate transition from "efficiency first" to comprehensive human development.

The flow of educational resources has shifted from the arduous journey in the physical world to the free movement in the digital world. The "cloud classroom" enables education to transcend boundaries and borders. From the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau to the Amazon rainforest and from urban classrooms to rural teaching sites, China's practice has proven that technology can become the greatest facilitator of educational equity. As long as the people are at the center and innovation is the driving force, the vision of educational equity will eventually become a reality. **BR**

The author is an assistant research fellow at the Center for Science, Technology and Human Rights at Beijing Institute of Technology
Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to liangxiao@cicgamericas.com

Serving the Greater Bay Good

Thomas So Shiu-tsung's three-decade career reflects Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)'s rule of law evolution. He was president of the Law Society of Hong Kong from 2016 to 2018 and currently serves as head of the Hong Kong Regional Arbitration Centre's Online Arbitration Platform of Asian African Legal Consultative Organization. As a legal expert qualified in multiple jurisdictions, he aligns his professional strength with national strategies and promotes legal synergy in south China's Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

So attended the Third Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, in Beijing from March 4 to 10, along with more than 2,000 other members of the committee. On the sidelines of the meeting, *Beijing Review* reporter Tao Zihui interviewed So about the integration of Hong Kong's legal services into the region's development. Edited excerpts of their conversation follow:

***Beijing Review*: China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes. You have advocated for Hong Kong's legal sector to engage in the initiative and the GBA's development. How can Hong Kong more effectively capitalize on the strategic opportunities from national development?**

Thomas So Shiu-tsung: I have always believed that Hong Kong's role as a bridge in our country's overall development remains steadfast, to facilitate connectivity both internally and externally. Although the essence of this bridge endures, the elements it carries have evolved over time. From carriages and people, to cars and trucks, and now to information, the bridge remains, but its traffic has transformed.

We must reflect and plan ahead. From the initial flow of physical capital, to the interconnection of information networks in the new century, and now to the bidirectional integration of resources under the BRI—where international capital once flowed into the mainland through Hong Kong, and now mainland enterprises use Hong Kong as a gateway to emerging markets, with a shift in focus from developed to developing countries. While preserving the bridge's structural stability, we must continue to create irreplaceable connectivity value through rule convergence, talent development and service model innovation amid shifting national strategies.

As the integration of legal service resources within the GBA is advancing, what professional qualities should young Hong Kong lawyers possess to stay ahead?

In 2014, as vice president of the Law Society of Hong Kong, I led an initiative to enable Hong Kong lawyers to practice on the mainland through a special qualification mechanism. With the advancement of the GBA strategy, we successfully advocated for a policy allowing lawyers from Hong Kong and Macao SARs to provide legal services in the nine Guangdong cities in the GBA after passing a special exam and meeting certain criteria.

Since then, nearly 500 lawyers from Hong Kong and Macao have sat for the exam with outstanding results, expanding practice opportunities and fostering mutually beneficial cooperation between mainland and Hong Kong and Macao law firms. Mainland firms have enhanced their international capabilities by collaborating on foreign-related cases, while Hong Kong and Macao lawyers have learned from mainland firms' innovative technology-driven operations and client management. This two-way exchange has effectively broken down traditional barriers in legal services, especially in business promotion and digital transformation, where mainland practices have provided valuable insights for Hong Kong lawyers.

Looking ahead, I believe that in 10-20 years,

we may have a unified GBA lawyer team, enhancing regional legal services and building an internationally competitive system. Faced with industry competition, it's crucial to accelerate legal service integration in the GBA and broaden our international perspective. Young Hong Kong lawyers should enhance their capabilities in three areas: mastering the legal systems of both the mainland and the SAR, as well as bilingual communication; capturing market dynamics and expanding resources in emerging markets; and embracing legal technology reforms and innovating law firm management and services with AI.

Hong Kong's professional organizations are relatively slower to reform, so we must actively catch up and leverage technology for reform. Additionally, professional service organizations should collaborate, with lawyers, accountants, financial institutions and other foreign-related service teams working together to support enterprises going overseas. The key lies in breaking through traditional paths through continuous reforms: on the one hand, leveraging technology to improve service efficiency and transforming tools like AI from auxiliary roles into competitiveness elements; on the other hand, closely aligning with national strategies and establishing specialized service capabilities tailored to the legal needs of BRI participants.

By aligning with our country's overall development, we can upgrade our value and open up broader development spaces. The future is bright and promising.

XINHUA

A ferry sails across Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Victoria Harbor on October 3, 2024

How do you think the establishment of the headquarters of the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) in Hong Kong will influence Hong Kong's legal system and dispute resolution landscape?

Hong Kong has been diligently preparing for the establishment of the IOMed's headquarters, slated for later this year. This groundbreaking intergovernmental body, dedicated to mediating international disputes, will be the first of its kind globally and the inaugural intergovernmental organization based in Hong Kong. This underscores the Central Government's trust in the SAR's legal system and solidifies its role as an international dispute resolution hub.

The IOMed aligns with China's policy of promoting harmonious dispute resolution, echoing our country's commitment to peaceful conflict management. With decades of experience in dispute resolution, I've witnessed Hong Kong's prowess in cross-border litigation and international arbitration. However, these methods often lead to relationship strain. Mediation, instead, fosters consensus for long-term mutual benefit, resonating with the Chinese cultural value of harmony.

Mediation should be the first resort before arbitration. Now that Hong Kong is chosen to host the headquarters of the IOMed, societal sectors, especially business communities, must unite to build a mediation-centric early dispute resolution mechanism. Contracts of large enterprises and chambers of commerce should include mediation clauses. Hong Kong's pre-litigation mediation success offers valuable lessons. Additionally, promoting the unification of mediator reservoirs and rules within the GBA and establishing an online mediation platform are needed.

What are the highlights and achievements of the online arbitration collaboration platform established by the eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre in July 2024 across the GBA in terms of resource integration, talent exchange and rule unification?

This demonstrates the progress in developing and integrating dispute resolution services through collaborative efforts among various arbitration institutions within the GBA. The platform has inked contracts and memorandums of understanding with several esteemed arbitration and mediation institutions across the nine cities in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao that make up the GBA, with a focus on aligning qualifications and rules.

Cooperation memorandums tailored to each city have been signed, beginning with easily implementable arbitration service collaborations aimed at serving parties and integrating resources. For instance, Foshan, known for its furniture and lighting industries, can offer expert support in related cases; Hong Kong, with its legal and technological prowess, can facilitate expert exchanges for joint case handling and service improvement.

Additionally, the platform fosters talent exchange, including personnel visits between the Foshan Arbitration Commission Secretariat and Hong Kong. Efforts are underway to reach a consensus on arbitration case handling rules and promote unification. Considering the differing arbitrator qualification systems in Hong Kong and the mainland, the potential for unification is being explored. Ultimately, a unified arbitration and mediation platform in the GBA will be established, achieving comprehensive integration and enhancing the region's overall systems and collaborative efficiency in arbitration and mediation. **BR**

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
Comments to taozihui@cicgamericas.com

U.S. Regime Change Under Trump 2.0: Empire at a Crossroads

By Danny Haiphong

Donald Trump was elected U.S. president in 2016 with a platform opposing regime change. After four years, his administration attempted to overthrow the Venezuelan regime by violently appointing an unelected puppet Juan Guaido as the "interim president," covertly continuing President Barack Obama's efforts to overthrow the Syrian Government, and nearly taking the U.S. to war with Iran through the assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. In 2024, Trump was elected again by an even stronger margin on the platform of being a "peacemaker." The question is: Will this be the moment when a U.S. president truly changes the course of American foreign policy away from regime change wars and toward peace?

The U.S. has conducted hundreds of regime change operations since World War II and has been successful in dozens. However, regime change comes with costs. America's shrinking share of global economic influence and its overextended military power has led to a reliance on proxy wars, covert operations, and shock and awe wars of aggression. The result: chronic instability, chaos and economic impoverishment, to which Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and several other nations can attest.

Indeed, Trump has demonstrated a willingness to normalize ties with Russia and work toward a negotiated settlement in Ukraine. However, it's important to note that despite the influence of rugged individualism over the American psyche, one individual cannot fundamentally transform the character of U.S. foreign policy and there are a litany of signs that Trump is no crusader against regime change.

On Ukraine, Trump has engaged in talks with Russia while maneuvering to shed the responsibility of "security" in the region to NATO's European member states. U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told NATO in Brussels in February 2025 that the U.S. would focus on the "communist Chinese" who have the "capability and intent to threaten our homeland." Instead of lasting peace, then, the U.S. under Trump is seeking to pivot away from a lost war in Ukraine and toward what it sees as a bigger imperative: containing the rise of China.

In the Middle East, the Trump administration has made more direct attempts at regime change. Trump approving Israel's renewed assault on Gaza has shocked the world. The administration has also taken a firm position that the U.S. will play an active role in preventing Hamas from ruling in Gaza in direct violation of the right of Palestinian people to determine their political destinies. Trump's team has delivered a letter to Iran demanding the Islamic Republic follow the U.S.' demand to negotiate or face military consequences. To make matters worse, Trump has launched a lengthy military operation against Yemen's Houthi movement.

Trump's early foreign policy record indicates a dire need for Americans to understand "regime change" in a deeper way. Yes, regime change means the overthrow of governments, but the overthrow of governments is never without purpose. The purpose is the maintenance and expansion of U.S. imperial domination, and therefore all forms of U.S. interventionism are in a way linked to regime change. While Trump claims not to pursue direct regime change of any particular country, his administration's foreign policy remains committed to upholding U.S. dominance and the political manipulation required to achieve this.

Trump's assertion that he will act as a "peacemaker" has thus been challenged just a few months into his presidency. In the months ahead, all eyes must be on a U.S. shift away from direct conflict with Russia and toward addressing the West Asia and Asia Pacific theaters. The goal is to position the U.S. to confront China's rapid rise and the economic miracle undergirding it. Whatever changes in U.S. foreign policy occur, even positive ones like a possible end to the Ukraine conflict, reflect the American empire coming to a difficult crossroads: either willingly adjust to the reality of a multipolar world where rising Global South countries like Russia and China are influential or wage war until the end. Until the American people stand up en mass to the elites in control of U.S. foreign policy, expect the latter to characterize the foreign policy legacy of Trump 2.0. **BR**

While Trump claims not to pursue direct regime change of any particular country, his administration's foreign policy remains committed to upholding U.S. dominance and the political manipulation required to achieve this

The author is an independent journalist and researcher in the U.S. He is a contributing editor to the Black Agenda Report and founding member of the No Cold War international campaign
Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to linan@cicgamericas.com

The Dimming of the Beacon

By Liang Xiao

On March 14, U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order to reduce funding for the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and six other federal departments, scaling back their operations to the legal minimum. As a result, USAGM-affiliated media outlets, including Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, will see substantial funding cuts or even elimination.

The USAGM oversees U.S. Government-funded foreign media outlets. According to its latest report to Congress, the agency employed around 3,500 media professionals and operated with a budget of $886 million in 2024. Officially, USAGM-affiliated media outlets are tasked with promoting America's narrative and strengthening U.S. soft power. In practice, however, much like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—whose foreign aid contracts have already been drastically reduced by over 90 percent under the Trump 2.0 administration—USAGM functions as a key tool for spreading U.S. ideology, advocating American-style democracy. A prime example of this is that many Voice of America programs are inaccessible within the U.S. and are broadcast exclusively to select foreign audiences.

As expected, Trump's decision to cut funding once again drew fierce criticism from his political opponents in the Democratic Party and nearly all U.S. mainstream media, with the exception of Fox News. The Trump administration defended the funding cuts, arguing that these agencies had failed in their mission and were plagued by corruption. However, critics contend that, beyond its unrivaled economic, technological and military dominance, the core of global U.S. hegemony lies in its ideological leadership.

To many, the world is divided into ideological camps, with the U.S. positioning itself as a beacon of democracy and freedom, guiding struggling nations toward progress.

The true essence of democracy has never been about replicating a perfect model, but about each civilization's independent exploration to discover a development path suited to its own national conditions

Under this ideological framework, interventions in other countries' internal affairs are often presented with a veneer of righteousness. Confident in its global dominance, the U.S. has continued to orchestrate political upheavals abroad, toppling foreign governments while neglecting its own domestic challenges.

Deteriorating infrastructure, a distorted industrial structure and escalating wealth inequality are among the pressing social issues that have yet to receive genuine attention. As of May 2023, U.S. manufacturing employment had declined by approximately 5 million jobs since 2000. During nearly the same period, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans controlled around 32 percent of the nation's wealth, while the poorest 50 percent held a mere 2.5 percent. These structural imbalances have fueled populism in the Rust Belt, which ultimately helped Trump reclaim pivotal swing states like Pennsylvania and Michigan in the 2024 election.

The continued pursuit of regime-change interventions has not improved America's soft power. From Iraq to Libya, from the Arab Spring to the Ukraine crisis, it has become increasingly clear that what the U.S. promotes is not prosperity and stability, but rather constant instability.

Ironically, America's fixation on these interventions has ultimately poisoned its own political environment. When fervent supporters of a defeated Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol in 2021, they were following the same tactics the U.S. has employed to destabilize foreign governments—supporting opposition forces, manipulating media narratives and inciting street movements. That same year, a survey conducted by U.S. think tank Pew Research Center of 16 advanced economies, including 1,600 international respondents and 2,500 Americans, found that 57 percent of global respondents and 72 percent of Americans no longer considered the U.S. a model democracy worthy of emulation.

From this perspective, the corruption and inefficiency of USAID and USAGM are indicative of the structural crisis facing American-style democracy. For both the U.S. and the world at large, the U.S.' diminishing obsession with serving as the so-called beacon of democracy may not be something to lament. The true essence of democracy has never been about replicating a perfect model, but about each civilization's independent exploration to discover a development path suited to its own national conditions. The dimming of the beacon may not herald an endless night, but rather the dawn of a new day. **BR**

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
Comments to liangxiao@cicgamericas.com

Efforts Underway to Stimulate Consumption

By Lan Xinzhen

An action plan to vigorously boost consumption was issued on March 16 by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council. The action plan proposes a total of 30 policy measures in eight categories, including initiatives to increase the incomes of both urban and rural residents, improve the quality of goods and services, rectify measures restricting consumption and improve policies supporting consumption.

Consumption not only drives economic development, but also fulfills people's aspirations for a better life. Across the globe, China has been the world's second largest consumer market and the largest online retail market for more than a decade. The consumption demand and structure of the people in China constantly upgrade, the proportion of the service consumption expenditure continues to increase, and new market space expands.

However, the growth of consumption in recent years shows that domestic consumer confidence is not strong enough, and there is large scope for the improvement of the conditions facilitating consumption. In this context, the Chinese Government has issued the latest action plan with the aim of stimulating consumption in line with the policy goals of enhancing consumption ability through increasing incomes and reducing burdens, creating effective demand through high-quality supplies and enhancing consumption willingness through creating an environment more conducive to consumption.

The recent action plan highlights efforts in three aspects: increasing incomes, reducing burdens and improving quality.

Income is the foundation and premise of consumption. The action plan proposes to promote reasonable wage growth, expand property income channels, take multiple measures to increase rural residents' incomes and effectively solve the problem of payments in arrears.

Reducing burdens and increasing incomes together promote consumption ability and willingness. The action plan focuses on providing better services in healthcare, eldercare and childcare, with an aim of reducing financial burdens on households, alleviating the rigid expenditure pressure of urban and rural residents and unleashing resident willingness to spend.

It is not only an important stimulus for short-term economic recovery, but also a key measure for long-term economic restructuring and high-quality development

The action plan proposes an initiative to improve the quality of service consumption, including measures optimizing service supplies to the elderly and children, expanding consumption in lifestyle services, culture, sports and tourism, and steadily advancing opening up of the service sector.

Unlike the past practice of stimulating consumption through short-term subsidies, the latest action plan aims to activate the long-term engine of consumption. It is not only an important stimulus for short-term economic recovery, but also a key measure for long-term economic restructuring and high-quality development. The upgrading and expansion of consumption will drive the development of related industries, promote the upgrading of industrial structures and transform the investment-driven economic growth pattern to a consumption-driven one.

With full implementation of the action plan, China's consumer market will experience great changes in 2025. This action plan is crucial to the country's economic recovery and is an important measure for achieving high-quality development. **BR**

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Comments to lanxinzhen@cicgamericas.com

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Dialogue for Nuclear Solution

China, Russia and Iran call for more dialogue and urge an end to unlawful sanctions By Ma Miaomiao

In a fresh bid to strengthen communication and pave the way for the resumption of talks, China, Russia and Iran held a trilateral meeting in Beijing on March 14 to discuss the ongoing Iranian nuclear issue.

Chaired by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, with the participation of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, the meeting emphasized the necessity of terminating all unlawful unilateral sanctions, and reiterated that political and diplomatic engagement and dialogue based on the principle of mutual respect remains the only viable and practical option, according to the joint statement issued afterward.

China and Russia welcomed Iran's reiteration that its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes and not for the development of nuclear weapons, and that Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy needs to be respected, it said.

Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese Foreign Minister, met with the deputy foreign ministers from Russia and Iran on the same day. He proposed staying committed to the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as the basis for new consensus. "China hopes that all parties will work toward the same direction and resume dialogue and negotiation as early as possible," Wang said.

A stalemate

The trilateral meeting came days after the United States urged new talks on Iran's nuclear program. In early March, U.S. President Donald Trump said he had sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei proposing nuclear talks, adding that "there are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal," according to Reuters.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian responded that he would not negotiate with the U.S. while being "threatened," and Iran would not bow to U.S. "orders" to talk. Over the past decade or so, negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue have revolved around the U.S. and Iran without any progress.

During rounds of negotiations, China and Russia have approached with sincerity, hoping to resolve the issue through diplomatic means. In contrast, the U.S. and the West often employ coercive and forceful diplomatic measures, including military intimidation, diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions against Iran, Qin Tian, Deputy Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told China Central Television.

In the joint statement, the three countries urged the relevant parties to stay committed to addressing the root cause of the current situation and abandoning sanction pressure or threat of force, and also called for relevant parties to refrain from moves that may escalate the situation, so as to create a favorable atmosphere and conditions for diplomatic efforts.

Since the new U.S. administration took office, while ostensibly expressing willingness to resolve issues with Iran through dialogue, it has paradoxically intensified sanctions and attempted to revive the failed "maximum pressure" strategy—a key U.S. initiative introduced in 2015, which aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions and regional influence through severe economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation— of reducing Iranian oil exports to zero, Niu Xinchun, Executive Director of the China-Arab Research Institute at Ningxia University, said.

In 2015, Iran signed a nuclear deal, formally known as the JCPOA, with six major countries—the United Kingdom, China, France, Germany, Russia and the U.S.—agreeing to put some curbs on its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

However, the U.S. unilaterally quit the JCPOA in 2018 under the Trump administration and reimposed sanctions against Iran. Consequently, Iran began to gradually scale back its obligations under the JCPOA from May 2019.

The JCPOA lies in ruins following the U.S. withdrawal, Niu said, saying the current crisis directly stems from the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal, followed by the imposition of sanctions. More recently, during Trump's second term, the U.S. has threatened military action. This explains why the trilateral statement stresses that parties should first address the root causes of the issue and abandon sanction pressure or threat of force, before

engaging in discussions about the current nuclear situation, Niu added.

More dialogue needed

On March 13, Iran's foreign ministry summoned the envoys of Britain, France and Germany over what it called a "misuse of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to hold a closed-door meeting." The meeting, which came at Washington's request, took place the day before and was called by six of the council's 15 members—the U.S., France, Greece, Panama, the Republic of Korea and Britain, Reuters reported, citing Iranian state media.

China's permanent representative to the UN Fu Cong was quoted as saying ahead of the UNSC meeting that China still hopes that "we can seize the limited time we have before the termination date in October this year, in order to have a deal, a new deal so that the JCPOA can be maintained."

"Putting maximum pressure on a certain country is not going to achieve the goal," Fu said.

On July 20, 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2231 with 15 votes in favor, endorsing the JCPOA reached on July 14 in Vienna, Austria. The resolution came into effect on October 18, 2015, with a validity period of 10 years.

The Iranian nuclear issue has once again reached a critical crossroads, as a new agreement must be reached before this October. There are essentially two approaches to resolving it, Sun Degang, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the Shanghai-based Fudan University, told the *Global Times*.

One approach is the U.S. strategy, which has caused great difficulties for Iran's economy and people's livelihoods, threatening its survival and development, has led Iran to accelerate its uranium enrichment process and heightened nuclear proliferation risks, Sun said.

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A rally participant poses during celebrations of the 46th anniversary of the victory of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution in Tehran, Iran, on February 10

"However, another approach is the multilateral diplomatic resolution, which proved effective in the original Iran nuclear agreement a decade ago," Sun said, adding that China played a key role in that process, where all parties engaged in dialogue, sought common ground while setting aside differences, and ultimately reached a consensus on the nuclear deal.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor of Middle East studies at Shanghai International Studies University, told *China Daily* that amid the current complex situation, China hosted the trilateral talks with Russia and Iran as part of damage-control measures, which also showed the urgency of avoiding deterioration of the issue.

Unilateral moves by the U.S. out of self-interest have eroded the broad international consensus and mechanisms to address urgent issues such as this one. Such circumstances require countries to step up to uphold the consensus reached under the UN framework, he added.

Thus, the meeting in Beijing carries key messages. Iran is unwilling to negotiate directly with the U.S. at this time and is not ready or eager to yield to American demands, Qin explained, adding it also reflects Iran's trust in and emphasis on China's role in the Middle East.

Back in March 2023, China facilitated the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Beijing, demonstrating the effectiveness of China's unique mediation and promotion of dialogue in the region. Iran has high expectations for China's continued role and its hosting of relevant negotiations concerning the issue, Qin said.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on March 17 that "in the meeting, the cornerstone was laid for a constructive and fruitful process for the three countries, and for supporting the rule of law at the international level and promoting multilateralism." China always plays a "constructive and contributing" role as a permanent member of the UNSC and as part of the negotiation processes pertaining to the Iranian nuclear issue, he added. **BR**

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Comments to mamm@cicgamericas.com

Defense Awakening

The EU embarks on an unprecedented plan to reshape its security future

By Zhao Wei

On March 7, the European Union (EU) approved an unprecedented 800-billion-euro ($840 billion) ReArm Europe initiative at a special summit in Brussels, Belgium. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed the decision as a "watershed moment," emphasizing its goal of reducing Europe's reliance on external powers—particularly the United States—and establishing a more autonomous and resilient defense framework.

With shifting geopolitical dynamics and U.S. President Donald Trump reassessing Washington's stance on global security, European leaders agreed that the continent must take charge of its own defense.

According to the EU summit communiqué, the Russia-Ukraine conflict presents an existential challenge, underscoring the urgent need to bolster Europe's military capabilities, reduce strategic dependencies and close critical defense gaps. The plan aims to strengthen the EU's defense technology and industrial base.

Anxiety and ambition

ReArm Europe is a direct response to recent geopolitical upheavals that have exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's security architecture. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, which began in February 2022, shattered Europe's post-Cold War complacency. According to a statement from the EU Delegation to the U.S. on February 25, the bloc and its 27 member states have provided Ukraine with approximately $145 billion in aid since the conflict began.

At its core, the plan enables willing EU members to increase their military spending through eased budgetary constraints, potentially unlocking an additional 650 billion euros ($707 billion). Additionally, a proposed 150-billion-euro ($163 billion) loan program would support military investments across the bloc—an unprecedented financial commitment to European security.

Beyond the figures, the initiative seeks to reshape Europe's defense landscape. It envisions an integrated European defense industry capable of producing next-generation military equipment while establishing joint procurement mechanisms to enhance efficiency and interoperability among member states. The plan also calls for reforms to EU fiscal rules to sustain defense investments without triggering excessive deficit procedures, alongside efforts to develop rapid response capabilities that reduce Europe's reliance on external support.

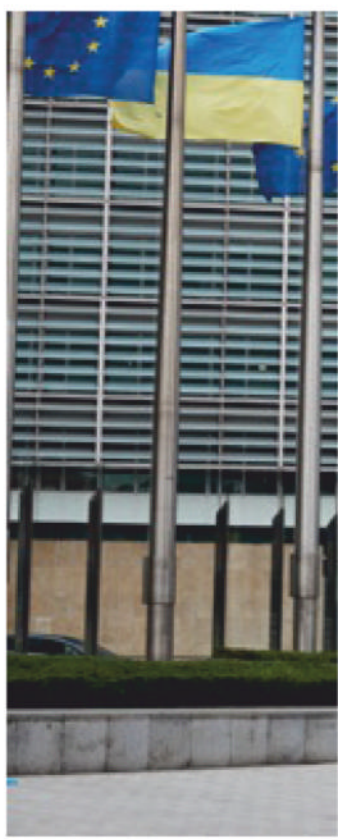
This is not Europe's first attempt to boost defense spending. "We are entering into a war economy, which is a change for many of us, and it will force us to invest more," French President Emmanuel Macron said at the Eurosatory military technology conference outside Paris on June 13, 2022.

Public anxiety mirrors government concerns. A June 2024 survey by the Institute for Global Affairs, a non-profit organization focused on geopolitics, found that only 6 percent of Western Europeans considered the U.S. a "very reliable" guarantor of European security in the decade to come. Skepticism is particularly pronounced in France, where half of respondents deemed the U.S. unreliable.

Trump's 2024 presidential victory has further heightened European concerns. His administration has shifted its approach to Europe and Ukraine, engaging directly with Russia while pressuring European nations to increase military spending and take greater responsibility for Ukraine's security. Additionally, Washington has threatened higher tariffs on European goods and expressed support for several far-right political parties, prompting the EU to accelerate its push for strategic autonomy.

Reality and challenge

Since the end of World War II and the establishment



The European Union (EU) headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, on February 24

of NATO in 1949, the U.S. has been the cornerstone of Europe's security. Today, as transatlantic relations face increasing uncertainty, Europe must chart a path toward greater self-reliance.

The ReArm Europe plan primarily focuses on substantially increasing defense spending within existing security frameworks and military-industrial systems. However, this approach essentially directs funds to American defense companies and perpetuates Europe's reliance on U.S. influence, albeit in a different form.

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A report titled The Future of European Competitiveness, authored by former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi and published by the European Commission, the EU's main executive body, in September 2024, highlighted the predicament. While many EU countries have been ramping up defense spending following the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, 78 percent of the 75 billion euros ($80 billion) EU nations spent on defense between June 2022 and June 2023 went outside the bloc, with 63 percent of it going to the U.S. The report argued that achieving true strategic autonomy requires Europe to develop a robust and independent defense industry.

Former NATO Secretary General and former Danish Prime Minister Anders Rasmussen echoed these concerns in an article for *The Economist* website on February 24. "Spending it on tanks, artillery and fighter aircraft will not be enough. Europe must also ensure it can act independently of America," he wrote, emphasizing the need for considerable investment in air defense, refueling and logistical capabilities, areas in which Europe remains heavily dependent on the U.S.

However, EU members remain divided on security priorities and financial commitments. While the ReArm Europe plan received broad support at the March 7 summit, some leaders voiced concerns. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni warned of the fiscal burden increased military spending would impose on Italy's already strained public debt. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, following a meeting with Macron on March 5, stated on social media platform X: "While we may disagree on the modalities of peace, we do agree that we must strengthen the defense capabilities of European nations." However, he also stressed that these efforts should empower member states rather than "Brussels bureaucrats."

In an interview with Xinhua News Agency on March 9, Ding Chun, Director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, outlined three key issues Europe faces in building a security framework beyond NATO. Geopolitically, Europe seeks to reduce U.S. control but remains reluctant to abandon its reliance on American security guarantees. Industrially, Europe's defense supply chain is deeply embedded in U.S. systems, making it difficult to establish a fully independent military-industrial base. Ideologically, there is a rift between France and Germany's vision of a "multipolar world" and the "Atlanticist" approach favored by Eastern European nations.

At its core, the ReArm Europe plan is a crisis-driven response that largely depends on loans and more flexible budget rules. Ultimately, the decision to increase military spending rests with individual EU member states, many of which already face economic pressures. While the plan marks a significant policy shift, it also reflects growing European anxiety over Trump's evolving approach to EU relations.

The initiative underscores Europe's long-term ambition for strategic autonomy, but breaking free from structural dependence on the U.S. will take decades, if not longer. The road to independence is fraught with challenges, and whether Europe can truly achieve strategic autonomy remains a question only time will answer. **BR**

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
Comments to zhaowei@cicgamericas.com

Guardians of Rights

How rights protection initiatives empower consumers and regulate markets

By Zhang Yage

Since its inception in 1991, the *315* show, an annual live broadcast on state broadcaster China Central Television, has attracted rapt national attention. The program, with its name in reference to World Consumer Rights Day on March 15, is part of China's engagement with the global initiative, with the purpose of exposing business activities that infringe on consumer rights and also of promoting market regulation.

Over the years, the program has brought to light regulatory violations by many domestic and foreign brands.

"After the cases are revealed at the event, brands often face significant public pressure and market losses, which prompt them to quickly implement remedial measures. For example, following the exposure of the pickled vegetable scandal, the involved companies not only removed the shoddy products from shelves but also comprehensively upgraded their production lines," Zhang Wei, Secretary General of the China Association for Quality Promotion, a non-profit organization focused on customer rights protection, told newspaper *Economic Daily*.

"The pickled vegetable scandal" was made public on the *315* show in 2022. The report exposed how the production processes of some traditional pickled vegetable products caused serious health risks to consumers. Involved brands were later punished by market regulators.

Market regulations

This year's *315* show exposed violations in some of the latest consumption trends. For example, in recent years, online home appliance repair platforms have mushroomed. The emergence of such companies relieves many consumers of the need to visit offline outlets to find technicians. Instead, they simply describe the issue on an online platform and book a door-to-door service.

One of the largest of these platforms Zmn.cn was accused of using deceptive tactics. One example was that the platform charged 100 yuan ($13.8) for fixing a faucet and 250 yuan ($34.5) for replacing the igniter of an oven or stove, while the normal charge for such services is only 20 yuan ($2.76). It also encouraged technicians to induce consumers into making large unnecessary expenditures. Additionally, the company reportedly took 60 percent of the service fee.

On March 16, the platform announced six major measures to address the problems reported on the show. These include reviewing all bookings resulting in complaints, implementing pricing transparency reforms to eliminate ambiguous charges, strengthening the management of employees, safeguarding the right of users to be informed about the real status of their appliances, and restructuring the income system for technicians.

"Enterprises are supposed to take the initiative to fulfill their social responsibilities, instead of reacting passively after their violations are exposed. By strengthening internal management and improving the quality of their products and services, they can regain consumer trust," Zhang said.

This year's program also highlighted new issues arising from the

development of AI technology. Several outbound call companies have utilized AI to make harassing calls, disregarding customer privacy.

By registering unverified social media accounts that do not require real-name authentication and operating these accounts using AI robots that can simulate human speech, companies can create tens of thousands of "virtual salesmen" to badger consumers at very low cost. Such practices violate the Law on the Protection of Consumer Rights and Interests, but companies have circumvented market regulation through technical means, resulting in large-scale illegal marketing.

After the show, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology coordinated related authorities in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong Province to investigate the companies behind the violations. They ordered telecom operators to suspend involved phone numbers, verify the circumstances related to personal data information leakage, and urged Internet platforms to completely clean up illegal promotion information for intelligent outbound call tools.

"With the widespread adoption of digital consumption and advancements in technology, consumer rights protection faces new challenges, such as personal information leaks and online fraud. In the future, the government needs to further strengthen related legal frameworks, particularly in the areas of data security and online consumption," Chen Lin, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Law, said.

Promotion of protections

In China, many government departments have developed a tradition of organizing events related to the protection of consumer rights around March 15. These efforts aim to assist consumers in identifying counterfeit and substandard goods and avoiding consumption traps, as well as raise their awareness of the legal avenues and methods available for safeguarding their rights.

On March 13, during an event co-organized by government departments in Laoting County, Hebei Province, special lectures were given on how to identify shoddy and fake medicines, cosmetics, home appliances and food products. The participating officials distributed over 10,000 leaflets, addressed more than 150 inquiries from customers, and handled five onsite complaints.

In Jinggu Dai and Yi Autonomous County in Yunnan Province, the local market regulatory authority hosted an exhibition in a public square showcasing a wide variety of counterfeit commodities that it recently confiscated, helping the public to recognize the characteristics and risks of such products. At the end of the event, 10.3 tons of counterfeit goods, worth 86,000 yuan ($11,867), were destroyed. These items included daily necessities, food and health products.

"The purpose of the activity is to deter businesses engaged in the production and sales of fake products, while also raising consumer awareness and encouraging them to actively safeguard their legitimate rights," Pan Liang, an official from the market regulatory bureau of Jinggu, said.

In addition to government departments, social organizations are also making contributions to the protection of consumer rights. On March 15, volunteers organized by the lawyers association in Baoding, Hebei Province, set up legal consultation booths in the city center, distributing legal manuals, and conducting interactive Q&A sessions. They addressed over 60 legal inquiries from businesses and consumers and distributed more than 400 copies of the Consumer Rights Protection Guide compiled by the association.

"I answered many customer inquiries today, including questions about how to avoid online fraud, how to claim compensation for purchasing counterfeit or substandard goods, and how to report false advertising. I hope such efforts can give consumers more knowledge about the lawful methods to protect their rights," Li Bin, a law student who volunteers at legal inquiries, told *Beijing Review*.

"The protection of consumer rights relies as much on strengthening consumer education as on the advancement of related laws and regulations. By raising awareness of rights protection among consumers, we can effectively reduce the occurrence of infringements. Therefore, the *315* show is not only an exposure platform but also an excellent opportunity for spreading related knowledge," Zhao Min, Director of the Consumer Guidance Department at the China Consumers Association, a national organization that monitors goods and services to protect the rights and interests of consumers, told newspaper *China Consumer News*. **BR**

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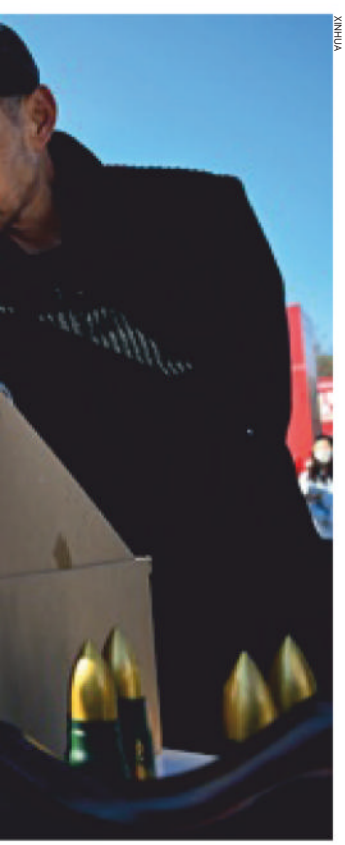
Consumers observe the differences between real and counterfeit products at a consumer rights awareness event in Hohhot City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, on March 15



XINHUA

Gazelle Gambit

Development of high-growth enterprises boosted in China

By Yuan Yuan

Inside the smart factory of Weihai Baowei New Material Technology Co. Ltd. in Shandong Province in east China, the entire production process—from raw materials entering the workshop to finished products being stored—requires no human intervention, making it a true "dark factory," an automated manufacturing facility that operates with minimal human intervention. Here, the facility produces over 10,000 square meters of carbon fiber pre-impregnated (Prepreg) materials daily, achieving 10 times the efficiency of traditional factories. Prepreg is a composite material that consists of reinforcing fibers such as carbon, glass or aramid that have been pre-impregnated with a resin system.

Baowei spent 10 years independently developing fully automated intelligent production lines. By applying "5G plus Industrial Internet" technology, the company has achieved full digital control over the entire Prepreg production process, establishing itself as an AI-driven, digitized super factory.

The company's core products, such as high-modulus carbon fiber Prepreg fabrics and carbon fiber components, are widely used in aerospace, sports equipment, automotive and electronics industries, serving as a stable supplier for quite a few major enterprises, including China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp. Ltd.

"Carbon fiber composites are in high demand but extremely difficult to produce," Jiang Bo, Chairman of Baowei, told newspaper *Dazhong Daily*. "Compared to traditional factories, our production and operational costs are pointedly lower. Moving forward, we aim to extend AI applications from production to research and development, creating an 'unmanned laboratory' to leverage our new material expertise and accelerate digital and intelligent transformation."

Baowei's predecessor was Baowei Fishing Gear, but the company rebranded itself in 2012 to pursue advanced material innovation. In September 2021, its AI-powered smart factory reached full production capacity, earning the company a spot on Shandong's Gazelle Enterprise list that same year.

Galloping with the times

The 2025 Government Work Report, delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening meeting of the Third Session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on March 5, proposes to support the development of unicorn companies and gazelle companies, enabling more businesses to accelerate in new arenas. This is the first time for the term "gazelle enterprise" to appear in the report.

The term is not new, though. The concept was first coined by Professor David Birch from the renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1990s, referring to high-growth tech firms that have surpassed the startup phase and are expanding rapidly in technology, business models and organizational innovation—as they share key traits with gazelles: "small in size, fast runners and high jumpers," mirroring companies that are small but agile, achieving rapid growth and breakthroughs.

The concept was introduced to China in 2003 in Beijing's hi-tech hub Zhongguancun. That year, the Zhongguancun Science Park launched the Gazelle Plan, providing financial support for such companies. This initiative demonstrated China's systematic focus on cultivating gazelle enterprises. Subsequently, national hi-tech zones and other innovation hubs began nurturing gazelle enterprises and building innovation ecosystems.

Beijing Kingbio Biotechnology Co. Ltd., founded in 2007, established its own laboratory in Zhongguancun in 2010, primarily focusing on the research and development (R&D) of clinical biologics for small animals. As the company expanded, its vaccine trials and industrial-scale production required larger facilities. In 2018, the company set up a subsidiary, Kingbio (Tianjin) Bio-Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd., in neighboring Tianjin Municipality.

Chen Huangshi, general manager of Kingbio (Tianjin), explained that after five to six years of development, the subsidiary in Tianjin had completed the creation of a high-standard, specialized veterinary biologics production facility.

"Four to five new drugs developed in Tianjin are set to obtain certification. The subsidiary has now evolved from a single production base into an integrated headquarters combining manufacturing, R&D and sales," he said. In 2024, Kingbio (Tianjin) was recognized as a gazelle enterprise.

Supporting sprinters

On July 30, 2024, a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee emphasized the need to "cultivate and strengthen emerging and future industries, and provide robust support for the development of gazelle and unicorn enterprises." Local governments actively

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Researchers at Kingbio (Tianjin) Bio-Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd. compare experimental data in the laboratory on February 20

responded by rolling out related policies.

As early as 2010, some local governments and hi-tech zones were already introducing measures to support gazelle enterprises, varying in specifics but generally evaluating criteria such as company age, growth rates and innovation metrics.

On November 1, 2022, the recommended national standard, Guide for Classification of High-Growth Enterprises, drafted by the China National Institute of Standardization and multiple national hi-tech zones, officially took effect. It defines gazelle enterprises as "high-growth companies whose business models are validated by the market, have reached a certain scale in revenue or employment, successfully overcome the startup phase, and entered a phase of rapid growth." The document specifies the revenue and growth rate requirements for such companies.

"For governments, supporting gazelle enterprises helps promote the formation of industrial clusters, optimize resource allocation and enhance regional economic development," Guo Liyan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, told China Central Television on March 6.

She added that gazelle enterprises are often considered precursors to unicorn enterprises. Unicorn enterprises are unlisted companies founded after the year 2000 with valuations exceeding $1 billion; gazelles are typically valued between $500 million and $1 billion and are expected to reach unicorn status within three years.

"Both gazelle and unicorn enterprises are emblematic of new technologies, industries, formats and models," she said. "Expanding market access and leveraging China's vast consumer base will help them commercialize technologies faster."

According to the Gazelle Cloud Database, a think tank specializing in gazelle enterprise research in China, as of November 5, 2024, China had certified 36,124 gazelle enterprises across 92 industries. These are concentrated in electronics, next-generation information technology and advanced manufacturing. Beijing, Guangdong Province and Shandong rank as the top three regions in terms of the number of gazelle enterprises.

Currently, many places, including Liaoning, Shandong, Jiangxi, Jiangsu and Hubei provinces, have launched "gazelle-to-unicorn" enterprise cultivation programs, establishing tailored funding and policy support. For example, an official from the Jurong City Science and Technology Bureau in Jiangsu revealed in an August 2024 media interview that the city offers up to 500,000 yuan ($69,200) in subsidies to companies newly certified as gazelle enterprises and those qualified as gazelle enterprises receive priority approval for municipal-level sci-tech projects.

"Once recognized as a 'gazelle,' companies gain stronger appeal to investors, making subsequent financing easier," Liu Chen, a researcher at the Bank of China Research Institute, told newspaper *Shanghai Daily*.

However, he noted that gazelle enterprises still face challenges, particularly a mismatch between rapid expansion and insufficient funding during mid-stage growth.

"From the government's perspective, financing support tools for gazelle enterprises remain limited," he said. "For commercial banks, the efficiency of financial backing needs improvement. Other financial institutions must also enhance interagency coordination to amplify their collective impact." **BR**

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A Higher End

Shenzhen's breakthrough robots and AI-powered business solutions revolutionize industries big and small By Li Xiaoyang

Baking bread, pouring milk and retrieving packages… the humanoid robot developed by Shenzhen Dobot Co. Ltd. can do it all. Launched on March 11, Dobot Atom is the world's first humanoid robot with embodied intelligence, featuring both dexterous manipulation and human-like straight-knee walking.

Founded in 2015, Dobot is based in Shenzhen, an economic powerhouse in south China's Guangdong Province. The company has been developing robotic arms and collaborative robots, or "cobots," designed to work alongside humans in shared workspaces.

Xie Kaixuan, Marketing Director of Dobot, told *Beijing Review* that Dobot Atom is powered by the company's self-developed Neural-Driven Dexterous System and Anthropomorphic Walking System. Over 90 percent of the robot's key components are also developed by the company.

"With strong adaptability, Dobot Atom can learn new tasks in less than two hours through AI training, even when not pre-programmed. It can execute and complete over 100 types of tasks via a range of tools," Xie said.

Standing 1.53 meters tall and weighing 62 kg, Dobot Atom adopts a 1:1 human-arm configuration. With a precision of roughly 0.05 mm and the ability to grasp items without causing damage, it can delicately handle fragile items like cherries, strawberries or pastries. The robot, with the ability to recognize stains, can also perform tasks like dishwashing.

The company focuses on developing robots for specialized niches to accelerate their application. Dobot robots are designed for different scenarios, including automotive assembly, coffee-making and nighttime medication retrieval in chain pharmacies. In these environments, they can navigate narrow spaces and recognize and retrieve diverse items. The company plans to launch pilot production by mid-2025, according to Xie.

Dobot is recognized as one of Shenzhen's national-level specialized and sophisticated enterprises (SSEs). As of late 2024, Shenzhen had over 1,000 SSEs, which refer to high-end, innovation-driven small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), data from the local government showed.

In recent years, SSEs have proliferated across China. These companies specializing in either traditional manufacturing or emerging industries with cutting-edge technologies are well-positioned to meet market demands and excel in competitive markets.

By December 2024, China was home to over 140,000 SSEs, including 14,600 "little giant" enterprises. These "little giants" are businesses that possess core technologies in niche markets and demonstrate great market potential, according to a conference on SMEs held that month.

Mimicking humans

As the No.1 cobot exporter in China, Dobot's products have been sold to over 80 countries and regions, including the United States, Germany and Japan. As of late 2023, it had secured 13 percent of the global cobot market.

According to Xie, over 70,000 Dobot cobots have been deployed in over 60 *Fortune* 500 firms worldwide. Its clients include Chinese tech firms Huawei and Xiaomi, U.S. consumer electronics company Apple, as well as Chinese car manufacturer BYD and German carmaker BMW.

In April 2024, the company introduced X-Trainer, a robot training system powered by AI. Given it takes a long time to train robots through programming, the AI system has shortened that time by around 70 percent. Moreover, this system, mimicking the human brain, allows Dobot robots to make real-time responses and self-correction.

To improve safety for human collaborators, Dobot has introduced SafeSkin, a contactless pre-collision technology, for its robots. Robotic arms equipped with this technology are sensitive to conductive materials, including human bodies, metals and water. They will automatically stop before making contact, thereby preventing potential hazards during operation.

Dobot Atom, a humanoid robot produced by Shenzhen-based robot company Dobot, serves coffee to a staff member in a video released by the company on March 11

'Nice to meet you'

With just a single tap between two smartphones, AI-powered digital business cards can instantly share details such as personal introductions and social media profiles. This futuristic concept has been brought to life by Shenzhen-based Jiatui Technology Co. Ltd., a digital marketing solution provider established in 2017.

"The SOON AI name card, measuring only 2.8 mm thick, is equipped with near-field communication (NFT) technology and our self-developed chips," Ma Dan, Vice President of the company, told *Beijing Review*. According to her, the magnetic name cards automatically attach to the back of smartphones. Despite their slim design, they are powered by durable batteries that can last up to 28 days on a single charge. When not in use, the name cards enter a low-power sleep mode to conserve energy.

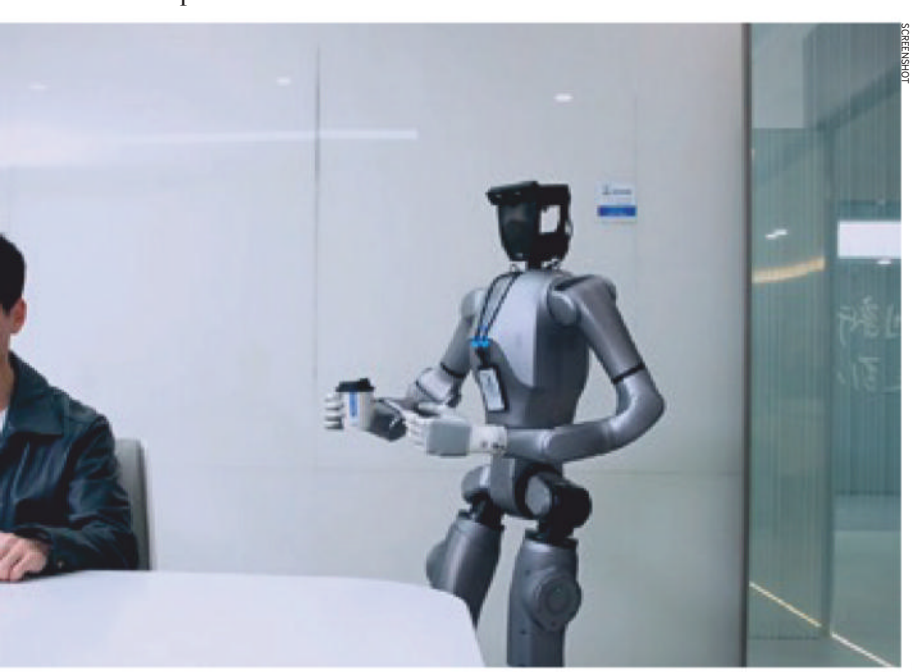
Ma explained that the product was developed to help domestic businesses expand globally, as it offers real-time translation for conversations in more than 100 languages. "With AI name cards on their phones, two people speaking different languages can hold video conversations with real-time translated subtitles, even across different communication apps," she said, adding that they can also identify potential clients based on browsing history.

Since its launch last November, more than 10,000 SOON AI name cards were sold in just one month, with over half of the sales in overseas markets. The company now receives orders for over 10,000 units per month.

Currently, the company has around 120 employees, with 80 percent focused on research and development (R&D).

By integrating with the domestically developed AI platform DeepSeek, the translations on the name card have become more accurate and natural. Jiatui is also working on expanding the product's functions to include meeting recordings and key point extraction.

"The complete supply chains and dynamic business environment in Shenzhen have allowed Jiatui to gather resources and drive innovation," Ma said, adding that the company is accelerating its efforts to increase investment in R&D and expand its market presence.



SCREENSHOT

Cracking the code

Established in Shenzhen in 2019, Chengcheng Group is another national-level SSE, leveraging AI technology to tap into the egg industry. The company's revenue totaled 3.5 billion yuan ($480 million) in 2023.

China is a large producer and consumer of eggs, while different pricing in different domestic regions often lead to profit losses for farms. Farms sometimes also find it hard to meet consumer needs due to limited sales channels.

According to Chengcheng, it has developed an AI-based supply chain system that provides real-time data, including daily egg prices and trends in price fluctuations. This system helps address the mismatch between supply and demand, ensuring efficient transactions between farms and food-related enterprises while enabling farms to enhance profitability through fair pricing.

Given eggs usually have a shelf life of 14 to 30 days, and it may take some time for them to reach consumers from farms and distributors, Chengcheng has developed a network of nearly 200 warehouses across China to store and distribute eggs. The company adopts AI technology to optimize transportation routes for maximum efficiency and enables real-time tracking, further boosting logistics performance.

Small but strong

Sun Wenkai, Vice President of the National Institute of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Renmin University of China, told *Beijing Review* that many SSEs have developed strong innovation capacities and a solid market presence. Therefore, these companies play a notable role in strengthening and bridging gaps within China's supply chains.

However, SSEs still face challenges related to funding, talent acquisition and innovation. Although access to funding has improved in recent years, direct financing continues to be a hurdle. Sun stressed that financial institutions need to shore up support through inclusive finance and equity financing.

"The authorities should create a level playing field so that smaller enterprises can survive and thrive. Also, SSEs need to keep exploring niche industries to develop their competitive advantages," he said. **BR**

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Reimagining Retirement

The prospects and challenges of robot-assisted elderly care

By Ji Jing

Recently, a robot dog named Xiao Xi has joined a nursing home in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, as a "caregiver."

"Grandma Zhao, it's 12 p.m., time for your medicine," Xiao Xi reminds an elderly resident. After making the announcement, Xiao Xi lies down patiently, waiting for Zhao to take her medication.

Xiao Xi has been "on duty" at the Jinqiu Jiayuan Nursing Home for a month and has already become very popular. Residents often see it carrying a medicine box, navigating the corridors and courtyards to remind them to take their medicine on time.

"My memory isn't good, and I often forget to take my medicine. With Xiao Xi's reminders, I'm now able to take it on time," Grandma Zhao told local media outlet City Link. She also noted that Xiao Xi is like a real pet dog. When she commands it to "take a walk," it immediately stands up and follows her. "Having Xiao Xi with me makes me feel safe, and I attract a lot of attention on the street," she said.

Unlike the heavy-duty robot dogs typically used in industrial settings, Xiao Xi weighs only 14 kg. Despite its small size, it's quite capable. It can deliver meals and medicines, accompany seniors on walks, and use its navigation function to guide them to restrooms.

Xiao Xi is a product of Westlake Robotics, a robotics company founded in Hangzhou in June 2021 by Wang Donglin, Director of the Machine Intelligence Lab in the School of Engineering at Westlake University. The university is a new research-oriented university founded in 2018 in Hangzhou.

Wang Sicong, an algorithm engineer at Westlake Robotics, explained to City Link that Xiao Xi's intelligence stems from the depth camera and industrial camera on its head. The depth camera measures the distance between itself and objects, and analyzes potential obstacles in its path. The industrial camera, with its higher resolution, primarily focuses on recognizing human bodies.

"If an elderly person suddenly falls, the robot will issue an alarm and notify caregivers," Wang Sicong said. Future algorithm upgrades will enable Xiao Xi to perform even more tasks. For example, it could be equipped with a large language model to engage in conversations with the elderly. Facial recognition capabilities could also transform it into a sentinel, tracking the real-time location of residents and mitigating the risk of them getting lost.

Prospects

Intelligent robots have garnered significant attention at this year's Two Sessions—annual meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC), the top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the top political advisory body—from March 4 to 11. The Government Work Report, delivered at the opening meeting of the Third Session of the 14th NPC, highlighted the cultivation of future industries such as biomanufacturing, quantum technology, embodied AI and 6G. Embodied AI refers to the integration of AI into physical entities like robots, enabling them to perceive, learn and react to their environments.

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Visitors interact with a companion robot at the 2025 Global Developer Conference in Shanghai on February 21. The conference, which ran from February 21 to 23, is an AI event for global developers to communicate, collaborate and innovate

XINHUA

A staff member from a medical tech company in Weifang, Shandong Province, showcases a rehabilitation robot on April 17, 2024

Recent population data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that in 2024, China's population aged 60 and above reached 310 million, accounting for 22 percent of the national population. It is projected to exceed 400 million by 2035, according to the National Health Commission's Department of Aging and Health. Currently, the elderly care industry faces a shortage of 5.5 million caregivers nationwide. Robots can help address this gap, alleviating the social and familial burden of caring for the elderly and supporting them in maintaining independent and high-quality lives. In fact, robot-assisted eldercare is rapidly transitioning from a concept to a tangible reality.

According to a report on China's elderly care robot industry in 2024, released by the Qianzhan Industry Research Institute, the market size of elderly care robots in China in that year was approximately 7.9 billion yuan ($1 billion) and is projected to reach 15.9 billion yuan ($2 billion) by 2029.

Liu Qingfeng, Chairman of AI company iFlytek, told financial news outlet Economic View, "It is estimated that in about three years, eldercare robots will enter homes, performing tasks such as serving tea and water, companionship and health monitoring. However, it may take about five years for such robots to provide nursing services to disabled and semi-disabled elderly people in the same way that professional caregivers do."

Liu said with the development of embodied AI and the rapid advancement of dexterous hands (robotic hands designed to carry out human-like functions with the flexibility, precision and adaptability to manipulate objects in complex ways) and servo motors (a self-contained electrical device that moves parts of a machine with high efficiency and great precision), the era of AI companion robots entering households is approaching. He believes that elderly care robots have the potential to become a 1-trillion-yuan ($138 billion) emerging industry.

Challenges ahead

Despite these promising prospects, China's smart elderly care industry is still in its early stages of development, and the widespread adoption of eldercare robots faces several hurdles, such as high prices and technological limitations.

Wu Zhe, Chairman of Foshan Xuyao Intelligent Robot Co. Ltd. in Foshan, Guangdong Province, told financial news platform Time Finance that high cost is a major factor limiting the market penetration of elderly care robots.

Zhang Yunquan, a researcher at the Institute of Computing Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, told Economic View that elderly care requires highly personalized services, and has high requirements for product safety and convenience. This translates into high research and development costs, making the price unaffordable for many families.

"At the same time, elderly care robots require complex technologies. Achieving a closed loop of perception-decision making-execution independently requires technological breakthroughs in areas such as computing power and AI algorithms—the core components that enable machines to simulate human-like intelligence and perform complex tasks autonomously," Zhang added.

However, experts believe one thing is certain: The future elderly care market will be redefined by AI-powered elderly care robots. Robot-assisted eldercare is something we can all look forward to. **BR**

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Weight Watchers

New national weight management campaign promotes a healthy lifestyle through new measures By Lu Yan

Fu Li, a middle school teacher in Changchun, Jilin Province, was relieved to see the country stepping in to assist with weight control. Her father has struggled with heart disease and hypertension due to his unhealthy eating habits. Despite Fu's repeated efforts to persuade him to adopt a healthier diet, he still has not changed.

"My father loves oily, salty dishes and occasionally drinks alcohol, not acknowledging the severe consequences of this lifestyle," Fu shared with *Beijing Review*. "But when I told him that the Central Government is taking action to help people lose weight and live healthier lives, he became more receptive. It sparked his interest and made him consider what changes he can make. I believe that with the right support, he may finally be motivated to improve his health."

The 2025 Report on the Work of the Government, delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening meeting of the Third Session of the 14th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, in Beijing on March 5, reaffirmed China's commitment to a health-first strategy in its medical and health system. At a news conference on March 9, Lei Haichao, head of the National Health Commission (NHC), announced plans to establish more weight management clinics at medical and other health-related facilities, helping people to lose weight safely and pivot to healthier lifestyles.

"Some people are struggling with weight management, dealing with expanding waistlines and exceeding healthy weight limits. Some have even developed chronic illnesses, requiring assistance from professional doctors and medical institutions," Lei said, calling for sustained efforts by the government, different sectors of society and individuals.

Pay attention!

Lei emphasized the launch of a three-year campaign aimed at improving public weight management.

In 2024, Chinese authorities, including the NHC and the ministries of education and civil affairs, released a document on the NHC's official website to kickstart this three-year initiative, which advocates for a lifestyle that promotes healthy eating and active participation in physical exercise across society.

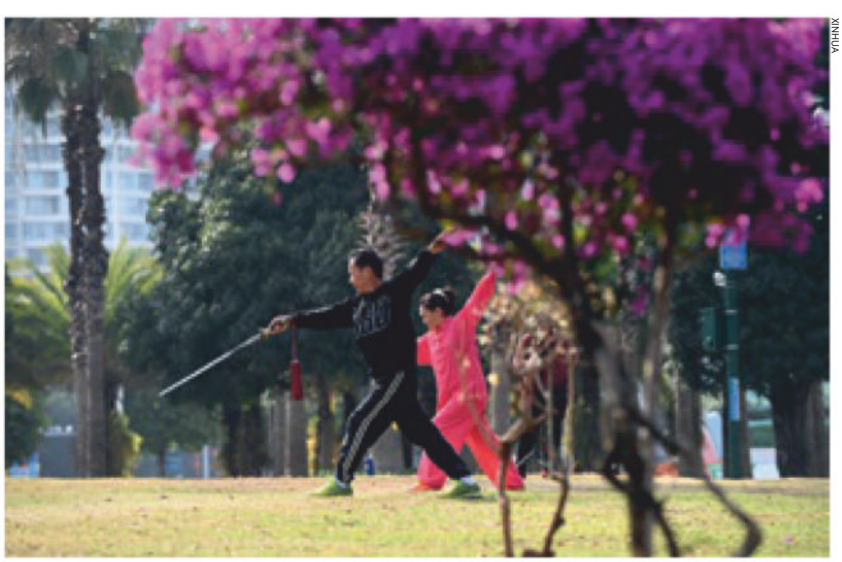
Specific measures include, among others, strengthening the capabilities of medical and health institutions, disease control agencies and professionals in weight management and health education.

"The NHC has enlisted Olympic champions as ambassadors of the weight management campaign and has also developed memes on [China's super app] Weixin to integrate weight management and chronic disease prevention into people's daily lives," Lei said.

Following Lei's remarks on the sidelines of the annual gathering of national lawmakers in Beijing, where the year's priorities and goals are set, the hashtag "The country's calling you to drop those pounds" quickly became trending online. Social media platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu (RedNote) were flooded with reactions. Some netizens expressed their willingness to participate, while others sought specific advice on how to lose weight.

Taking action

The 2024 weight management guidelines released by the NHC warn that if the current trend of an increasing number of overweight people is not effectively addressed, by 2030, the rates of overweight and obesity among adults and children in China could reach 70.5 percent and 31.8 percent, respectively.



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People hone their martial arts skills at a park in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on February 4

XINHUA

Students play soccer during a physical education class at a primary school in Beijing on February 21

As of now, the obesity rate among Chinese adults is 16.4 percent. Among children under 6 years old, the obesity rate is 3.6 percent, while for children and adolescents aged 6 to 17, it is 7.9 percent. In comparison, in 1982, the obesity rate among children and adolescents aged 7 to 17 was only 0.2 percent, according to the NHC.

"Weight management is not a short-term endeavor; it requires establishing healthy habits. It is recommended to pursue weight loss in a scientific manner under professional guidance," Lei Sha, an attending physician in the Department of Endocrinology and Metabolism at Shanghai-based Tongji Hospital of Tongji University, told news portal Cnr.cn.

In 2021, Lei's department set up a specialized outpatient clinic for obesity. This clinic conducts standardized assessments for obesity and its related complications, providing personalized treatment and comprehensive management to reduce and maintain weight, thereby promoting overall health improvement.

In March, the Medical Weight Management Center was established at the Capital Institute of Pediatrics in Beijing, with the goal of offering professional and comprehensive weight management services for children.

"Middle schools are making increasing efforts to help students stay fit and healthy by incorporating the management of students' physical fitness into their health monitoring systems and educational quality evaluations," said Fu, the middle school teacher in Changchun.

Moreover, authorities in different regions have committed to supporting the national initiative for weight management and encouraging a healthy lifestyle. For example, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has set clear goals. Using the average annual increase in overweight and obesity rates from 2019 to 2023 as a baseline, it intends to reduce the average annual increase in overweight and obesity rates among adults and children by 10 percent from the baseline during the 2024-26 period. Official data indicate that the adult population in Xinjiang has an overweight rate of 34.05 percent and an obesity rate of 24.2 percent.

Zhejiang Province, where the total overweight and obesity rate has reached 47.6 percent, will support a range of fitness activities. These include different sports contests.

Many regions have implemented plans that use "one scale, one measuring tape and one calendar" for weight management. These initiatives encourage families, healthcare institutions, elderly care facilities, schools, government agencies, businesses and hotels to provide weight scales or body composition analyzers.

Guangdong Province has launched an initiative to encourage university students to participate in physical exercise at on-campus sports fields. Similarly, Hainan Province has proposed students to "put down their phones, leave their dorms and head to the sports fields" for extracurricular physical activities, emphasizing the importance of managing their body weight. **BR**

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Comments to luyan@cicgamericas.com

Small Volume, Big Value

Micro dramas generate economic benefits both domestically and internationally By Kang Caiqi

Married at First Sight, The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband, My Death Brings Flames... These, and many more micro drama titles that are wildly popular among viewers, are reshaping China's entertainment landscape. Last year, micro dramas, once an emerging genre of entertainment riddled with low-budget productions, surpassed films in terms of market value for the first time, generating 50.4 billion yuan ($6.9 billion).

Meanwhile, the user base for Chinese micro drama apps had reached 576 million in June 2024, exceeding those of food delivery services, online literature and online car hailing platforms, according to a white paper released by the China Netcasting Services Association in November 2024. The micro drama sector also reportedly offers approximately 648,000 jobs.

"Micro dramas feature highly concentrated plots that are rich in twists and turns. While adhering to some conventional tropes, it avoids being predictable. To some extent, they are more like a service tailored to my emotional needs," Qin Lian, a 32-year-old fan of micro dramas, told *Beijing Review*.

Following several adjustments, the National Radio and Television Administration defines micro dramas as "online dramas with a single episode duration ranging from tens of seconds to 20 minutes, with a relatively clear theme, as well as a relatively continuous and complete storyline."

A new channel

In the early stages, micro dramas were primarily distributed on short video platforms like Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, and Kwai, with their revenue generated mainly through advertising and paid subscriptions.

As this industry evolves, mainstream video streaming platforms in China now also consider micro dramas a key component of their content reservoir, aiming to enhance user engagement. For example, iQiyi began producing micro dramas late last September, and within just three months, some series achieved a single-month revenue exceeding 1 million yuan ($138,200).

Beyond the increase in broadcasting platforms, the content of micro dramas has also diversified. Renowned directors, film and television production companies, TV stations, as well as some government departments hoping to promote local specialty products and tourism resources, have all presented their offerings, leading to the continuous emergence of high-quality productions.

With its rapid rise, micro drama has evolved from an entertainment product into a powerful marketing channel. Last year, many well-known brands produced their own dramas to engage audiences, including international food and beverage giants such as McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks.

Customized micro dramas involve close collaboration between a brand and the production team, demanding the seamless integration of brand elements into the storyline—from script development and character design to scene layout. Although this approach requires meticulous planning and execution, an increasing number of brands are trying to ride the new wave of advertising, as the investment not only serves as an ideal way to increase

their market recognition but also delivers tangible economic benefits.

For instance, among the 48 brands in the top 30 most-watched micro dramas on Douyin's e-commerce platform Douyin Mall, 35 reported remarkable month-on-month sales growth after the productions were released. Fifteen of them saw their sales increase by more than 100 percent, demonstrating substantial impact.

Notably, as its customized micro drama was released, KFC simultaneously introduced new menu items, and the marketing boost generated by the broadcast contributed to an astonishing 1,890-percent month-on-month sales growth.

Another typical example is that of Pechoin, a long-established skincare brand in China, which also saw its sales double following the release of two episodes of a popular micro drama that were custom-made for it.

Beyond borders

Chinese micro dramas are also gaining traction globally. According to DataEye, an online data analysis platform for the gaming industry, the cumulative downloads of Chinese micro drama apps abroad reached nearly 55 million in 2024, with the apps' overseas revenue reaching $170 million. Some of them have topped the charts in mobile app stores across many countries.

Chinese micro drama platforms, including ShortMax, GoodShort and DramaBox, are actively expanding into the Southeast Asian market, offering local audiences a vast selection of dubbed Chinese series. Productions with distinct Chinese characteristics, particularly those set in ancient times and those heavily inspired by mythology, are particularly popular in Southeast Asian countries, due to shared cultural backgrounds, their appealing attire and intricate details.

Dubbed dramas aside, the platforms also offer original content created specifically for overseas audiences. Correspondingly, Chinese micro drama companies are extending their business operations internationally. Dimension Drift HK Ltd. is one of those companies.

According to Xiao Mengyuan, founder of Dimension Drift HK Ltd., costs for producing micro dramas in North America are clear-cut. Over the past two years, expenditures have risen greatly, driven by bigger investment in better sets, casts, costumes and other elements. Despite the increases, their budgets remain considerably lower than those associated with conventional TV series.

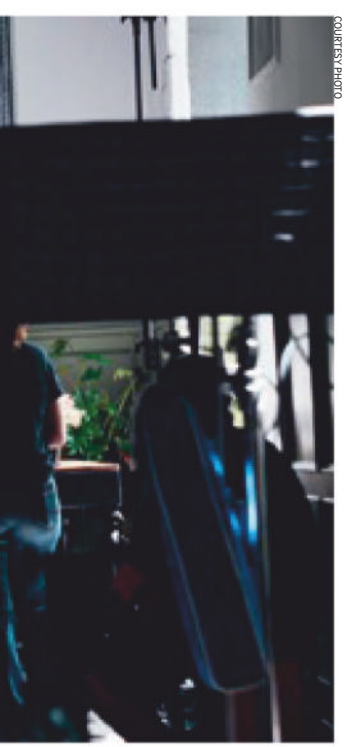
Some of the company's micro dramas targeting overseas audiences are adapted from Chinese hits. "Compared with the original Chinese versions, the North American adaptations' storylines and basic plots remain unchanged, but the backgrounds and details have been 'localized'," Xiao told *Beijing Review*.

Currently, Xiao's company collaborates with production teams from target markets in shooting micro dramas to be released abroad, with casting, set design and filming conducted locally. But all their directors come from China. "Domestic directors are well-versed in the format and better understand the key moments that serve as breaking points," she explained.

In addition to adapting scripts, the company also develops original scripts tailored to the preferences of individual broadcasting platforms, proceeding to joint production upon approval. "Projects with existing scripts are prepared within a month and a half, while those developed from scratch require two to three months. Filming typically takes eight days, followed by one to two months of post-production. The entire process moves quickly. From the beginning of this year until now (early March), we already have seven dramas in production," Xiao said.

According to her observations, the overseas micro drama market is booming, with many platforms, and even TV stations, joining the production landscape. "Each platform is leveraging its unique strengths to explore and develop its own signature genres. For instance, some platforms originate from online literature services and have an abundance of phenomenal web fictions ready for micro drama adaptation, while certain TV stations have access to well-known actors for casting. Therefore, identifying the genre of drama one excels in is especially important," she added.

In the future, she intends to further refine localization efforts to create scripts with competitive advantages. **BR**



COURTESY PHOTO

Chinese company Dimension Drift HK Ltd.'s team works on site in Los Angeles, the United States, in July 2024

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
Comments to kangcaiqi@cicgamericas.com

Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to elsbeth@cicgamericas.com

Scrolling Through Time

A traditional Chinese scroll painting depicting prehistoric civilization in Hunan Province was on display at the National Museum of China from February 20 to March 27.

Measuring 140 meters in length and 1.8 meters in height, this artwork is the product of two years of collaboration among several contemporary Chinese art masters. It offers a panoramic depiction of Hunan's prehistoric civilization, spanning 500,000 years of history.

The scroll begins with the primal existence of the region's earliest inhabitants, who migrated across the floodplains and crafted tools by striking stones. It then transitions to portray the transformative shift brought about by rice cultivation and the rise of settled life.

Alongside the stunning piece, the exhibition featured 49 sets of prehistoric artifacts, comprising 91 individual pieces. These included stone tools unearthed from the Pengtoushan site (dating back 9,400-8,200 years), pottery from the Gaomiao Culture (dating back 7,000 years) and jade pieces excavated from the Chengtoushan site (also dating back 7,000 years). Each artifact resonated with the scroll's different scenes and themes, making for a tangible connection to the past.

This exhibition presented a fusion of Hunan's archaeological discoveries and artistic interpretation, offering visitors a visual and historical journey through the region's prehistoric trajectory toward civilization. **BR**

(*Text and photos by Wei Yao*)

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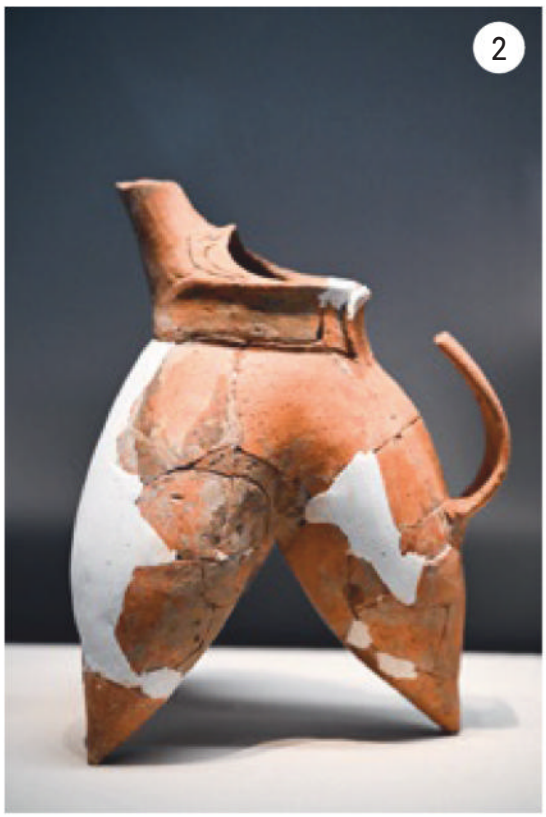
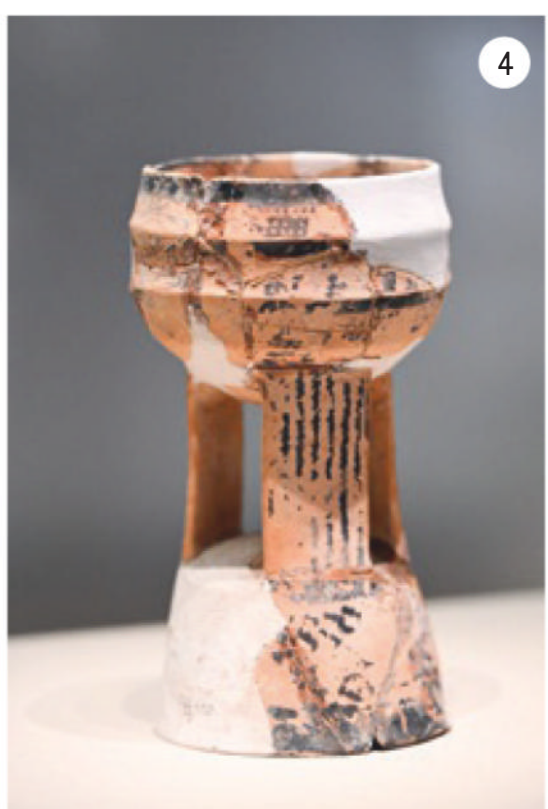
Comments to weiyao@cicgamericas.com





1. Blending the visual and tangible, the display presents a union of archaeological findings and artistic interpretations

2. A pottery artifact unearthed from the Chengtoushan site dating back 7,000 years

3. A pottery cauldron belonging to the Gaomiao Culture dating back 7,000 years

4. A colored pottery cup discovered at the Chengtoushan site

5. A stegodon molar unearthed from the Yuchanyuan site, dating back to the Paleolithic era

Dancing on the Roof of the World

By Musab Abdikadir

'Musab, I am sending you New Year greetings from the peak of the world!" This message, which I received at the start of 2025, ranks among my favorite New Year greetings of the year because it came from a friend I made in Xizang Autonomous Region during a cultural trip last year. It reminded me of the mesmerizing landscapes and, more importantly, the incredible people whose warmth and hospitality made my time there unforgettable.

The journey to Xizang was the realization of a long-held fascination, nurtured during the vibrant Tibetan dances at Minzu University of China (MUC) in Beijing. Every Friday night, the campus would come alive as students from diverse backgrounds gathered in circles, swaying together in Tibetan dance. Normally, the dance is led by beautifully dressed students in traditional Tibetan attire; they form the inner circle and radiate an infectious energy that captivates everyone, helping students in outer circles to easily follow the dance moves. These communal dances, where elegant moves seamlessly bridged cultures, not only sparked my curiosity but deeply moved me. They highlighted the power of dance to unite people across different ethnic groups, celebrating the rich cultural and natural landscape of Xizang.

Intrigued by these interactions and the beauty of Tibetan culture, I often dreamed of dancing atop the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau—the "roof of the world." This dream became a reality when MUC co-organized a cultural trip with *Minzu Huabao*, a pictorial magazine documenting China's ethnic minority culture, offering a valuable opportunity to experience and engage with the culture I had come to admire from afar.

Upon arrival in Lhasa, the challenge of adapting to the high altitude at over 3,000 meters was daunting. Equipped with advice and medication recommended by friends, alongside support from our school and the regional government, which provided doctors and all necessary equipment, I braced myself for the physical adjustments. Despite my initial concerns, the overwhelming reaction I experienced was not physical discomfort but rather a profound emotional response to the warmth and generosity of the Tibetan people. Their spirit, far more impactful than the thin air, touched my heart deeply, making the acclimatization process a secondary concern to the rich human connections formed.

COURTESY PHOTO

Musab Abdikadir befriends a local girl while visiting the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, on October 10, 2024

The depth of spiritual and cultural richness I encountered in Xizang was embodied in the everyday interactions with the locals. Their light-hearted yet spiritually deep demeanor was touching, enhancing my connection to the region. This was reflected not just in their actions but also in their cuisine, which became a transformative element of my journey. The taste of fresh, creamy butter and the discovery of butter tea were nothing short of revelatory. Each sip and bite deepened my understanding of Tibetan culture, revealing culinary delights that were previously unknown to me.

Our exploration of Lhasa and Xigaze was marked by engaging visits to significant cultural sites, enhanced by our guides' passionate storytelling. We visited the majestic Potala Palace, admired the architectural beauty of Palkhor Chode Monastery, strolled through the bustling Barkhor Street and spent time at the revered Jokhang Temple and Shalu Monastery. Our guide shared insights into the global significance of these sites, explaining that devotees not only travel from distant regions within China but also from other countries to undertake their religious pilgrimages.

We visited the village of Nudu, which is recognized as a model for ethnic unity and progress. During our visit, we spoke with the village head. He emphasized that one of his main economic objectives is to raise the average personal income of the village residents. By continuing to improve living standards, he aims to sustain the village's status as a model for progress.

This journey not only brought me closer to fulfilling my dream of visiting all provincial-level regions in China but also deepened my appreciation for the intricate tapestry of human connections across cultural boundaries.

On my final night in Xizang, I participated in a traditional Tibetan dance, a full-circle moment that mirrored the dances back at MUC. With a cup of butter tea, surrounded by both old and new friends, I realized my dream of truly experiencing Xizang, where every dance step and every shared cup of tea is a testament to the enduring warmth and spirit of its people, and a reminder that people are always central to our experiences. **BR**

The author is a Somali graduate student studying ethnology at Beijing-based Minzu University of China
Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to linan@cicgamericas.com

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